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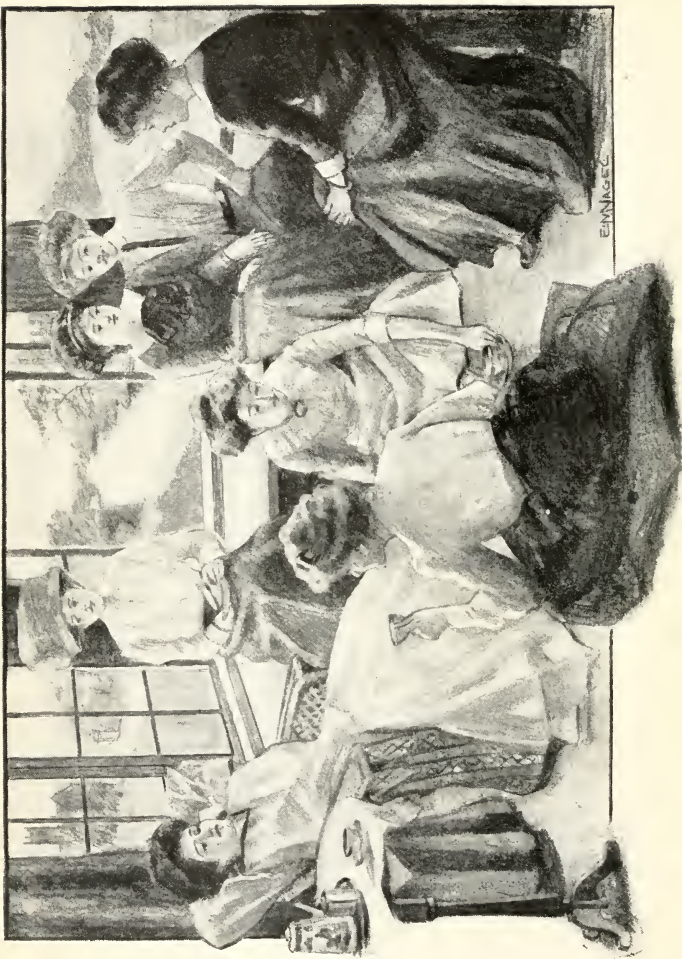
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THEY WERE ALL THERE



# BETTY WALES ON THE CAMPUS

by

MARGARET WARDE

*author of*

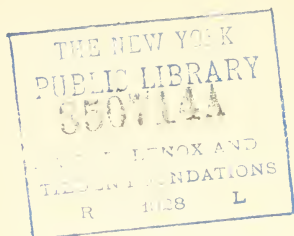
BETTY WALES, FRESHMAN  
BETTY WALES, SOPHOMORE  
BETTY WALES, JUNIOR  
BETTY WALES, SENIOR  
BETTY WALES, B.A.  
BETTY WALES & CO.  
BETTY WALES DECIDES



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THE PENN PUBLISHING  
COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA

1920



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**Betty Wales on the Campus**

## Introduction

MOST of the girls in this story first became acquainted with each other in their freshman year at Harding College, and the story of their four jolly years together and their trip to Europe after graduation is told in "Betty Wales, Freshman," "Betty Wales, Sophomore," "Betty Wales, Junior," "Betty Wales, Senior," and "Betty Wales, B. A."

It was during this memorable trip that Betty met Mr. Morton, the irascible but generous railroad magnate. "Betty Wales & Co." describes how Betty and her "little friends" opened the successful "Tally-ho Tea-Shop" in Harding, and what came of it. Babbie Hildreth's engagement to Mr. Thayer was one result, and another was that Mr. Morton gave to Harding College the money for a dormitory for the poorer girls. Betty's "smallest sister" Dorothy was also in Harding attending Miss Dick's school, and it was for her that Eugenia Ford invented the de-

lightful Ploshkin. Somebody modeled one, and as little plaster ploshkins were soon being sold everywhere, it turned out to be one of the Tally-ho's most popular and profitable features. Betty had thought she would leave the shop to Emily Davis and return to her family, but this story tells how she found herself again on the Harding Campus. And finally, how Betty Wales, with the aid of one other important person, chose her career and left Harding, will be found in "Betty Wales Decides."

MARGARET WARDE.



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Betty Wales on the Campus.



# Betty Wales On The Campus

## CHAPTER I

### “TENDING UP” AGAIN

BETTY WALES, with a red bandanna knotted tightly over all her yellow curls—except one or two particularly rebellious ringlets that positively refused to be hidden—pattered softly down the back stairs of the Wales cottage at Lakeside. Softly, because mother was taking her afternoon nap and must on no account be disturbed. Betty lifted a lid of the kitchen range, peered anxiously in at the glowing coals, and nodded approvingly at them for being so nice and red. Then she opened the ice-box, just for the supreme satisfaction of gazing once more upon the six big tomatoes that she had peeled and put away to cool right after lunch—which is the only proper time to begin getting dinner for a fastidious

family like hers. Finally she slipped on over her bathing suit the raincoat that hung on her arm, and carefully opened the front door. On the piazza the Smallest Sister and a smaller friend were cozily ensconced in the hammock, "talking secrets," as they explained eagerly to Betty.

"But you can come and talk too," they assured her in a happy chorus, for Betty was the idol of all the little girls in the Lakeside colony.

Betty smiled at them and pulled back the raincoat to show what was underneath. "Thank you, dears, but I'm going for a dip while the sun is hot. And Dorothy, don't forget that you've said that you'd stay here and see to everything till I get back. And if more girls come up, don't make a lot of noise and wake mother. Good-bye." And she was off like the wind down the path to the beach staircase.

Half a dozen welcoming shouts greeted her from the sand.

"We've waited ages for you," cried one.

"Dare you to slide down on the rail," called another.



"I'M SORRY I WAS LATE"





"No, slide down the bank," suggested a third.

Betty gave her head a funny little toss, threw the raincoat down to one of them and slid, ran, jumped, and tumbled down the sheer bank, landing in a heap on a mound of soft sand that flew up in a dusty cloud around the party.

"I'm sorry," she sputtered, wiping the dust out of her eyes. "Sorry that I was late, I mean. The sand is Don's fault, because he dared me. You see, I had to mend all Will's stockings, because he's going off to-morrow on a little business trip. And then I had to see to my fire, and remind Dorothy that she is now in charge of mother and the house. Beat you out to the raft, Mary."

Mary Hooper shook off her share of the sand-cloud resignedly. "All right," she said. "Only of course I've been in once already, and I'm rather tired."

"Tired nothing," scoffed one of the Benson girls. "You paddled around the cove for five minutes an hour ago, poor thing! That's all the exercise you've had to-day. Betty's the one who ought to be tired, with all the cook-

ing and scrubbing and mending she does. Only she's a regular young steam engine ——"

Betty leaned forward and tumbled Sallie Benson over on her back in the sand. "Hush!" she said. "I don't work hard, and I'm not tired, and besides, I shall probably lose the race. Come along, Mary."

The race was a tie, but Betty declared that Tom Benson got in her way on purpose, and Mary Hooper retorted that Sally splashed her like a whole school of porpoises. So they finally agreed to try again going back, and then they sat on the raft in the sunshine, throwing sticks for Mary's setter to swim after, and watching the Ames boys dive, until Will appeared on the shore shouting and waving a letter wildly—an incentive to Betty's getting back in a hurry that caused Mary to declare the return race off also, especially as she had lost it.

"Didn't want to bother you," explained Will amiably, "but Cousin Joe drove me out in his car, and I thought that maybe the chief cook ——"

Betty seized the letter and ran. "I knew things were going to happen," she murmured

as she flopped up the beach stairway. "But there's an extra tomato that my prophetic soul told me to peel, and lots of soup, and lots of ice-cream. Oh, dear, I'm getting this letter so wet that I shan't ever be able to read it." She held it out at arm's length and looked at the address. It was typewritten, and there was a printed "Return to Harding College" in the corner. "Nothing but an old circular, I suppose," she decided, and laid it carefully down in a spot of yellow sunshine on the floor of her room to dry off.

Of course there was no time to open it until dinner was cooked and eaten ; and then Cousin Joe piled his big car full of laughing, chattering young people and drove them off through the pine woods in the moonlight.

Betty was in front with Cousin Joe. "Things look so much more enchanted and fairylike if you're in front," she explained as she climbed in.

Cousin Joe chuckled. "You always have some good reason for wanting to sit in front, young lady," he said. "When you were a kid, you had to be where you could cluck to the horses. But I certainly didn't suppose

you went in for moonlight and fairies and that sort of thing. I thought you were a hard-headed business woman, with all kinds of remarkable money-making schemes up your sleeves."

Betty patted the embroidery on her cuff and frowned disapprovingly at him. "You shouldn't make fun of the Tally-ho Tea-Shop, Cousin Joe. It does make money—really and truly it does."

"Well, I guess I know that," Cousin Joe assured her solemnly, "and I understand the extremely marketable nature of ploshkins. Will keeps me very well posted about his wonderful sister's wonderful enterprises that are backed by the Morton millions."

"Don't be silly, please, Cousin Joe," begged Betty. "I've just done what any girl would have under the circumstances, and I've had such very scrumptious luck—that's all."

Cousin Joe put on slow speed, and leaned forward to stare at Betty in the moonlight. "You've pulled off a start that any man might envy you, little girl, and you're just as pretty and young and jolly as if you'd never touched money except to spend it for clothes

and candy. And you still love fun and look out for fairies, and some day a nice young man—I say, Betty, here’s a long straight stretch. Change seats and see how fast you can tool her up to the Pine Grove Country Club for a cool little supper all around.”

“Oh, could I truly try?”

Betty’s voice sounded like a happy child’s, and her eyes sparkled with pleasure and excitement, as her small hands clutched the big wheel.

Cousin Joe leaned back and watched her. “I had a tough pull when I started out in life,” he was thinking, “and no ‘such very scrumptious luck,’ either, and I let it sour me. Betty’s game, luck or no luck. Luck’s not the word for it, anyway. Of course people want to keep friends with the girl who owns that smile. It means something, her smile does. It’s not in the same class with Miss Mary Hooper’s society smirk. I can’t see myself why that nice young man that I almost said was going to fall in love with her some day doesn’t come along—several of him in fact. But I’m glad I didn’t finish that

sentence; I suppose you could spoil even Betty Wales."

Betty remembered her letter again when she stepped on it in the dark and it crackled. She had undressed by moonlight, so as not to wake little Dorothy, who shared her room at the cottage. Now she lit a candle, and opening her letter read it in the dim flickering light. Something dropped out—a long slip that proved, upon further examination, to be a railroad ticket from Cleveland to Harding and back again. And the typewritten letter—that might have been "only an old circular"—was signed by no less a personage than the President of Harding College himself. Seeing his name at the end, in the queer scraggly hand that every Harding girl knew, quite took Betty's breath away, and as for the letter itself! When she had finished it Betty blew out the candle and sank down in an awe-stricken little heap on the floor by the window to think things over and straighten them out.

Prexy had written to her himself—the great Prexy! He wanted her to come and advise with him and Mr. Morton and the architects about the finishing touches for Morton Hall.

Of all absurd, unaccountable ideas that was the queerest.

"Mr. Morton originally suggested asking you," he wrote, "but I heartily second him. We both feel sure that the ingenuity of the young woman who made the 'Tally-ho Tea-Shop' out of a barn will devise some valuable features for the new dormitory, thereby fitting it more completely to the needs of its future occupants."

Morton Hall was the result of a suggestion Betty had made to her friend Mr. Morton, the millionaire. It was to give the poorer girls at Harding an opportunity to live on the campus and share in the college life.

"Gracious!" sighed Betty. "He thinks I thought up all the tea-room features. It's Madeline that they want. But Madeline's in Maine with the Enderbys, and wouldn't come. And then of course Mr. Morton may need to be pacified about something. I can do that part all right. Anyway, I shall have to go, so long as they have sent a ticket—right away too, or Mr. Morton will be sure to need pacifying most awfully. I wonder what in the world that postscript means."

The postscript said, "I had intended to write you in regard to another matter, connected not so much with the architecture of the new hall as with its management; but talking it over together will be much more satisfactory."

Betty lay awake a long while wondering about that postscript. When she finally went to sleep she dreamed that Prexy had hired her to cook for Morton Hall, and that she scorched the ice-cream, put salt in the jelly-roll, and water on the fire. She burned her fingers doing that and screamed, and it was Will calling to remind her that he wanted breakfast and his bag packed in time for the eight-sixteen.

At the breakfast table the cook—she ate with the family—gave notice. She was going away that very afternoon.

"Most unbusinesslike," Mr. Wales assured her solemnly, but with a twinkle in his eyes.

"Most absurd," Betty twinkled back at him. "I can't suggest a thing to those architects, of course, and they'll just laugh at me, and Prexy and Mr. Morton will be perfectly disgusted."



"You've got to make good somehow," Will assured her soberly. "It isn't every girl that gets her expenses paid for a long trip like that, just to go and advise about things. You're what they call a consulting expert, Betty. I'll look up your trains and telephone you from town."

"And I'll help you pack a bag," announced the Smallest Sister. "You're just going in a bag, like Will, and coming back for Sunday, aren't you, Betty dear?"

"Yes, I'm just going in a bag," Betty assured her laughingly, "and coming right back to Lakeside for Sunday. But perhaps in September—well, we need not think about September when it's only the middle of August; isn't that so, little sister?"

The Smallest Sister stared solemnly at her. "We ought to make plans, Betty. Now Celissa Hooper wants me to be her chum if I'm going to school in Cleveland this winter, but if I'm going to be at Miss Dick's again why of course I can't be chums with Celissa, 'cause I'm chums with Shirley Ware. So I really ought to know before long who I'm to be chums with."

"You certainly ought," agreed Betty earnestly. "But you'll just have to be very good friends with Celissa and with Shirley and with all the other girls until I come back, and then mother and father and you and I can have a grand pow-pow over you and me and the tea-shop and Miss Dick's and everything else under the sun. Now, who's going to wipe dishes for me this morning?"

"I am. What's a grand pow-wow?"

"We'll have one in the kitchen," Betty explained diplomatically, hurrying off with both hands full of dishes.

But the pow-wow was a rather spiritless affair.

"You're thinking of something else, Betty Wales," declared the Smallest Sister accusingly, right in the midst of the story of the Reckless Ritherum, who is second cousin to the Ploshkin and has a very nice tale of its own. "If you're going to look way off over my head and think of something else, I guess I'd rather go up-stairs and make beds all by my lonesome."

"I'm sorry, dearie," Betty apologized humbly, "but you see I feel just like a reck-

less ritherum myself this morning—going out to play with three terrible giants.”

“What giants are you going to play with?” demanded the Smallest Sister incredulously.

“The fierce giant, the wise giant, and the head of all the giants,” Betty told her. “The fierce giant eats reckless little ritherums for his breakfast—that’s Mr. Morton. The wise giant laughs at them when they try to show him how to make the house that Jack built—that’s the New York architect. The head of all the giants—that’s Prexy—shakes the paw of the poor little Ritherum kindly, and asks it not to be so silly again as to try to play with giants, and it gets smaller and smaller and smaller ——”

“Just exactly like Alice in Wonderland,” put in the Smallest Sister excitedly.

“Until it runs home,” Betty concluded, “to play with a little girl named Dorothy Wales, and then all of a sudden it gets big and happy and reckless again.”

“Then don’t be gone long,” advised Dorothy eagerly, “because I’m always in a hurry to begin playing with you some more.”

“Thank you,” Betty bowed gravely. “In

that case I won't let the fierce giant eat me, nor the wise giant blow me away with his big laugh, nor the head giant stare at me until I vanish, recklessness and all, into the Bay of the Ploshkin."

"I'd fish you up, if you did fall into the bay," Dorothy assured her, with a sudden hug that ended fatally for a coffee-cup she was wiping.

"But it was nicked anyway, so never mind," Betty comforted her, "and you've fished me up lots of times already, so I know you would again."

"Why, I never ——" began the Smallest Sister in amazement.

"All right for you," Betty threatened, putting away her pans with a great clatter. "If you've stopped believing in fairies and if you've forgotten how you ever went to the Bay of the Ploshkin and fished up ritherums and did other interesting things, why should I waste my time telling you stories?"

This terrible threat silenced the Smallest Sister, who therefore never found out how or when she had "fished up" her sister. But on the way east Betty, still feeling very like

a ritherum, consoled herself by remembering first her own simile, and then Will's "Maybe I'm not proud to know you!" blurted out as he had put her on board her train. A little sister to hug one and a big brother to bestow foolishly unqualified admiration are just the very nicest things that a reckless ritherum can have. And who hasn't felt like a reckless ritherum some time or other?

Mr. Morton was pacing the station platform agitatedly when Betty's train pulled in.

"Twenty-three minutes late, Miss B. A.," he panted, rushing up to her. He had always called her that. It stood for Benevolent Adventurer, and some other things. Grasping her bag and her arm, he pulled her down the stairs to his big red touring car. "The way these railroads are run is abominable—a disgrace to the country, in my opinion. Now when I say I'll get to a place at four P. M.—I mean it. And very likely I arrive at six by train—most unbusinesslike. Well, it's not exactly your fault that idiots run our railroads, is it, Miss B. A.? I thought of that without your telling me—give me a long credit mark for once. Well, I certainly am glad to see

you, and to find you looking so brown and jolly. No bothers and worries these days, Miss B. A.?"

"Except the responsibility of having to think up enough good suggestions for Morton Hall to pay you for asking me to come and for taking the time to be here to meet me," Betty told him laughingly.

Mr. Morton snorted his indignation. "That responsibility may worry you, but it doesn't me—not one particle. Now, by the way, don't be upset by any idiotic remarks of the young architect chap that has this job in charge. Whatever a person wants, he says you can't have it—that seems to be his idea of doing business. Then after you've shown him that your idea of doing business is to do it or know the reason why, he sits down and figures the thing out in great shape. He's a very smart young fellow, but he hates to give in. I presume that's why Parsons and Cope put him on this job—they've done work for me before, and they know that I have ideas of my own and won't be argued out of them except by a fellow who can convince me he really knows more about the job than I do. Just the

same, don't you pay much attention to his obstruction game. Remember that you're here because I want this dormitory to be the way you want it."

Betty promised just as the car drew up in front of the Tally-ho. "Thought you'd like a cup of your own tea," explained Mr. Morton, "and a sight of your new electric fixtures, and so forth. Miss Davis is expecting you. Let's see." He consulted his watch, comparing it carefully with Betty's and with the clock in the automobile, which aroused his intense irritation by being two minutes slow. "It's now three forty-one. I'll be back in nineteen minutes. If I can find that architect chap, I'll bring him along. He knows all the main features of the building better than I do, and he's a pretty glib talker, so I guess we'll let him take you over the place the first time."

Exactly nineteen minutes later, just as Betty and Emily Davis had "begun to get ready to start to commence," according to Emily's favorite formula, the inspection of the tea-shop and the exchange of summer experiences, the big red car came snorting

back and stopped with a jerk to let out a tall young man, who ran across the lawn and in at the Tally-ho's hospitably opened door.

"Mr. Morton wishes to know if Miss Wales——" he began. Then he rushed up to Betty. "By all that's amazing, the great Miss Wales is the one I used to know! How are you, Betty?"

"Why, Jim Watson, where did you come from?" demanded Betty in amazement.

Jim's eyes twinkled. "From the Morton Mercedes most recently, and until I get back to it with you I'm afraid we'd better defer further explanations."

Betty nodded. "Only you must just meet Emily Davis—Miss Davis, Mr. Watson. She's a friend of Eleanor's too. And you must tell me one thing. Is the architect out there with Mr. Morton?"

"No," said Jim solemnly, "he isn't, naturally, since he's in here with you. Architect Watson, with Parsons and Cope, at your service, Miss Wales."

"Are you the real one—the one in charge?" persisted Betty. "You aren't the one that won't let Mr. Morton have his own way?"



"I am that very one," Jim assured her briskly, "but there are some lengths to which I don't go. So please come along to the car in a hurry, or I shall certainly be sent back to New York forthwith."

"Gracious! That would be perfectly dreadful! Good-bye, Emily." Betty sped down the path at top speed, Jim after her.

"Did you stop to introduce yourself in detail, Watson?" inquired Mr. Morton irritably, opening the door of the tonneau.

"He didn't have to introduce himself," Betty put in breathlessly, "but I made him stop to explain himself, and now I certainly shan't worry about his objections and opinions, because I've known him for ages. Why, he's Eleanor Watson's brother Jim. You've heard Babe and me talk about Eleanor."

"I should say that I have," cried Mr. Morton jubilantly. "So you can manage her brother as nicely as you manage me, can you, Miss B. A.? I knew you ought to come up and see to things. Hurry along a little, Jonas, can't you? We're not out riding for our health to-day. There are some little things I haven't just liked, and now that I've

got Miss B. A. to help me manage you ——  
Feeling scared, Watson ? ”

“ Not a bit, sir, thank you,” said Jim with his sunniest smile. “ But I’m certainly feeling glad to see Miss Betty again.”

“ What’s that? Glad to see Miss B. A.? Well, I should certainly hope so,” snapped Jasper J. Morton. “ I’d have a good deal less use for you, sir, than I’ve had so far, if you weren’t.”

## CHAPTER II

### ARCHITECT'S PLANS—AND OTHERS

STOPPING at Prexy's house to get him to join the grand tour brought back Betty's "ritherum " feeling very hard indeed. Jim was so dignified and businesslike when he talked to Prexy and Mr. Morton ; they were both so dignified and intent on their plans for Morton Hall. And evidently they all seriously expected Betty to do something about it. Betty set her lips, twisted her handkerchief into a hard little knot, and walked up to the door, resolved to do the something expected of her or die in the attempt.

Jim, who was ahead, had the door open for the others when Mr. Morton commanded a halt.

" Might as well be systematic," he ordered, "and take things as they come,—or as we come, rather. Now, Miss B. A., shall there or shan't there be a ploshkin put up over this front door? "

"A ploshkin over the front door?" Betty repeated helplessly.

"Exactly," snapped Mr. Morton, who disliked repetition as much as he disliked other kinds of delay. "What could be more appropriate than a large ploshkin, cut in marble, of course, by a first-class sculptor? Stands for you, stands for earning a living when you have to, therefore stands for me and my methods, stands for our coöperation in putting through a good thing, whether it's a silly plaster flub-dub that half-witted people will run to buy, or a building like this with a big idea back of it. But Mr. President here seems to think I'm wrong in some way, and young Watson says a ploshkin won't harmonize with the general style of the architecture. Now what do you say, Miss B. A.?"

Betty suppressed a wild desire to laugh, as she looked from one to another of her three Giants' faces. "Please don't be disappointed, Mr. Morton," she began at last timidly, "but I'm afraid I think you're wrong too. A ploshkin—why, a ploshkin's just nonsense! It would look ridiculous to stick one up there." She laughed in spite of herself at the

idea. "It's 19—'s class animal, you know. The Belden might as well have a purple cow, and the Westcott a yellow chick, and some other house a raging lion to commemorate the other class animals. Oh, Mr. Morton, you are just too comical about some things!"

Mr. Morton frowned fiercely, and then sighed resignedly. "Very well, Miss B. A. It's your ploshkin. If you say no, that settles it. Mr. President, you and young Watson can decide between that Greek goddess of wisdom you mentioned and any other outlandish notion you've thought of since. It's all one to me. Now let's be systematic. The next unsettled row that we have on hand is about the reception-room doors."

This time, fortunately, Betty could agree with Mr. Morton, and the others yielded gracefully, being much relieved at her first decision. Then, quite unexpectedly, she had an idea of her own.

"Laundry bills cost a lot, and the Harding wash-women tear your thin things dreadfully. It would be just splendid if there could be a place in the basement where the Morton Hall girls could go to wash and iron, and press

their skirts, and smooth out their thin dresses."

Everybody agreed to this; the Giants forgot their differences and grew quite friendly discussing it. And up-stairs Betty thought of something else.

"Typewriters and sewing-machines are dreadfully noisy. That's one reason why the cheap off-campus houses are so uncomfortable, where most of the girls use one or the other or both. I remember Emily Davis used to say that sometimes it seemed as if her head would burst with the click and the clatter. If there could only be a room for typewriters and a sewing-room, with sound-proof walls ——"

"There can be," interrupted Jasper J. Morton oracularly, "and there shall be, if we have to put an annex to accommodate them. Miss B. A., you'll ruin me if you keep on at this rate. I presume I'm expected to install typewriters and sewing-machines. They're part of the fixtures, aren't they, Watson? If I say so they are? Well, I do say so, provided Miss B. A. accepts that proposal from —— See here, Mr. President, why don't

you take her off in a quiet corner and tell her what you want of her?"

Betty blushed violently at the idea of giving such summary advice to the great Prexy.

"Please don't hurry," she begged. "You can tell me what you want to any time, President Wallace. Mr. Morton is always in such a rush to get things settled himself; he doesn't realize that other people don't feel the same way."

"Don't I realize it?" snorted Mr. Morton indignantly. "Haven't I spent half my life hunting for people that can keep my pace? But I beg your pardon, Mr. President, if I seemed to dictate or to meddle in your personal affairs."

Prexy's eyes twinkled. "That's all right, Mr. Morton. Let's give him his way this time, Miss Wales, as long as we've got ours about the ploskin. Come and sit on that broad and inviting window-seat, and hear what we want you to do for us."

It was an amazing proposal, though Prexy made it in the calmest and most matter-of-fact way. The Student's Aid Association, it seemed, had reorganized at its commence-

ment meeting, had received a substantial endowment fund—so much Betty already knew—and had since decided to employ a paid secretary to direct its work and to look after the interests of the self-supporting students. It had occurred to President Wallace that the right place for the secretary to live was in Morton Hall, and to the directors that the right person to act as secretary was Betty Wales.

“The salary is small,” explained Prexy, “but the duties at first will be light, I should think. I assume that you will be in Harding in any case, to supervise your tea-shop enterprise. Now this salary will pay several extra helpers there, and give you time for an occupation that may be more congenial and that will certainly be of real help to the girls you have always wanted to help—to the whole college also, I hope. Living in this hall instead of the regular house teacher, you will have a chance to keep in touch with us as you could not off the campus, and you will still be reasonably near to the famous Tally-ho Tea-Shop.”

When he had finished, Betty continued to stare at him in bewildered silence. “How



does it strike you, Miss Wales?" he asked, with an encouraging smile.

Betty "came to" with a frightened little gasp.

"Why, I—I—it strikes me as too big to take in all at once, and much, much too splendid for me, President Wallace. I should just love to do it, of course. But I can't imagine myself doing it. Now Christy Mason or Emily or Rachel Morrison—I could imagine them doing it beautifully, but not me—I—me. Oh, dear!" Betty stopped in complete confusion.

"But the rest of us can easily imagine you as the first secretary of the Student's Aid," Prexy told her kindly. "We considered several others, but none of them quite fitted. We are all sure that you will fit. The board of directors wished you to understand that the choice was unanimous. As for me, I've always meant to get you on the Harding faculty some way or other, because the Harding spirit is the most important thing that any of us has to teach, and you know how to teach it. This position will enable you to specialize on the Harding spirit without bothering your

head about logarithms or the principles of exposition or cuneiform inscriptions or Spanish verbs. It seems like a real opportunity, and I hope you can take it."

"Oh, I hope so, too!" exclaimed Betty eagerly. "But the trouble is, President Wallace, the world seems to be just crammed with opportunities, and they conflict. One that conflicts with this is the opportunity to stay at home with my family. I hadn't decided, when I got your letter, whether I ought to come back to the tea-shop, or be with mother and father this winter. But living here and looking out for the Morton Hall girls does sound just splendid. Please, what would be the duties of the secretary, President Wallace?"

The President smiled. "Whatever you made them, I think. Perhaps the Student's Aid directors may want to offer a few suggestions, but in the main I guarantee you a perfectly free hand."

"Isn't that even worse than to be told just what to do—harder, I mean?" demanded Betty, so despairingly that Prexy threw back his head and laughed.

"Think it over," he advised. "Talk it over with Mr. Morton and your family. Write to your friends about it. By the way, I suppose you know that Miss Morrison and Miss Adams are to be members of our faculty next year."

Betty knew about Rachael's appointment, but not about Helen's.

"Oh, it would be great to be back," she declared. "There's no question of what I want to do,—only of what I ought to do, and what I can do. It would be terrible if I should start and then have to give up because I didn't know how to go on. It would be worse than being 'flunked out'—I mean than failing to pass your examinations," added Betty hastily.

"I understand the expression 'flunked out,'" Prexy assured her gaily, "but I never noticed any of your kind of girl in the 'flunked out' ranks. Well, think it all over. Mr. Morton will dance with impatience when he finds that everything can't be decided in a breath, and just as he wants it, but we'll let him dance a little; and if he uses too persuasive powers on you

in the meantime I should not be unwarrantably interfering if I objected."

"He can't object to you dictating in his private affairs a little," quoted Betty gaily, as they went back to join the other Giants, who were sitting on a pile of lumber, animatedly discussing the relative merits of different makes of typewriters.

"Sewing-machines we leave entirely to you, Miss B. A.," Mr. Morton told her, with a keen glance that tried to guess at her reception of Prexy's offer. "Just let me know the kind you want and the number. No hurry."

"That means that in about ten minutes he'll ask you what you've decided," murmured Jim in her ear. "Haven't you had enough of business for to-day, Betty? Let's cut out and take a walk in Paradise before dinner. We can just about catch the sunset if we hurry."

"My eye, but it seems good to see you again," Jim assured her warmly, as they scrambled down the path to the river. "And it seems good to see Paradise again, only it doesn't look natural in its present uninhab-

ited state. There ought to be a pretty girl in a pretty dress behind every big tree."

Betty demanded the latest news of Eleanor, who was a very bad correspondent, and then burst forth with her own plans and perplexities.

"I think you should accept the Harding offer by all means," Jim assured her soberly. "Only there's one thing I ought to tell you. I've been trying for a week to screw my courage up to the point of confiding it to the peppery Mr. Morton. His beloved dormitory can't possibly be finished in time for the opening of college."

Betty looked her dismay. "He'll be perfectly furious, Jim."

"Can't help it," returned Jim firmly. "He comes up nearly every week, and at least once in ten minutes, while he's here, he decides to enlarge or rebuild something. See how he upset everything to-day for your sewing-machines and typewriters and washing-machines. To-morrow some book-worm will get hold of him and suggest a library, and he'll want us to design some patent bookcases and build a wing to put them in." Jim looked Betty

straight in the eyes. "You simply can't hurry a good honest job. I'm likely to be hanging around here till Christmas."

"As long as that?"

Jim nodded, still scrutinizing her face closely. "Of course I know it won't make any difference to you, but it would make all kinds of difference to me, having you here. You can be dead sure of that, Betty."

Betty smiled at him encouragingly. "You mean you want me to be here to protect you from the pretty girls in pretty gowns who will begin jumping out at you from behind the trees the day college opens?"

Jim shrugged his broad shoulders defiantly. "I'm not afraid of any pretty girls. I suppose it will be a fierce game going around the campus with no other man in sight, but I guess I can play it."

"Oh, I see," murmured Betty, who was in a teasing mood. "You want me to introduce you to the very prettiest pretty girls."

"Prexy can do that," Jim told her calmly. "He's my firm friend since I stood by him so nobly in the war of the ploskin. But I do hope you'll be here. We could have some

bully walks and rides, Betty—you ride, don't you ? ”

Betty nodded. “ But I shall be dreadfully busy—if I come.”

“ I'll help you work,” Jim offered gallantly. “ I understand this secretary proposition pretty well. I was secretary to the O. M.—Old Man, that stands for, otherwise the august head of our firm—until they put me on this little job. I could give you pointers, I'm sure, though it's not exactly the same sort of thing you're up against. And I say, Betty, Eleanor has half promised me to come on this fall while I'm here. I'm sure she'll do it if you're here too.”

“ That would be splendid,” Betty admitted, “ only of course I couldn't decide to come just for a lark, Jim. I mustn't let that part of it influence me a bit.”

“ Well, just the same ”—Jim played his last and highest card,—“ if you want to be a real philanthropist, Miss Betty Wales, you'll let me influence you a little. If ever there was a good object for charity, it's a fellow who hasn't seen any of his family for nine months and has had to give up a paltry two weeks'

vacation that he'd been counting the hours to, to hold down a job that may, in a dozen years or so, lead to something good. It takes stick, I can tell you, Betty, this making your way in the world, and sometimes it's a pretty lonesome proposition. But I don't intend to be just dad's good-for-nothing son all my life, so I'm bound to keep at it. I hate a quitter just as much as dad does. I can tell you, though, it helps to have a good friend around to talk things over with."

Betty's brown eyes grew big and soft, and her voice vibrated with sympathy. "Don't I know that, Jim? Last year when Madeline and Babbie were both away at once it seemed as if things always went wrong at the Tally-ho, and I used to nearly die, worrying. And when they came back and we talked everything over, there was usually nothing much the matter."

"Exactly," agreed Jim. "So don't forget me when you're footing up the philanthropic activities that you can amuse yourself with if you decide on a Harding winter."

Betty laughed. "I won't," she promised



gaily, "although you don't look a bit like an object of charity, Jim."

"Appearances are frequently deceitful," Jim assured her.

"I should think so." Betty jumped up in dismay. "I appear to have the evening before me, but really I've promised to take dinner with Mr. Morton."

"Who-can't-be-kept-waiting," chanted Jim, giving her a hand up the steep bank.

Betty stayed in Harding two days, during which she had many long talks with Emily about the secretaryship and its possibilities. Being, as she picturesquely put it, a Morton Hall girl born too soon, Emily could speak from experience, and she suggested all sorts of things that Betty would never have thought of.

"But that's all I can do," she told Betty, when that modest little person declared that Emily, and not she, was surely the ideal secretary. "I can explain what ought to be done, but I couldn't do it. It takes a person with bushels of tact to manage those girls. Maybe you aren't as good at planning as Rachel or I. That's nothing. You've got

the bushels of tact. That's the unique quality that the directors had the sense to see was indispensable. You're 'elected' to accept, Betty dear, so you might just as well telegraph for your trunks."

But Betty did nothing quite so summary. She wanted to talk things over with the family, who would be sorely disappointed, she knew, if she decided to come back to Harding, after she had hinted that perhaps the Tally-ho could go on with only flitting visits from its Head Manager. Besides, there was no use in losing the rest of August at Lakeside, and the Smallest Sister would grieve bitterly if the ritherum broke its promise to come home soon and play. Betty resolved to have Dorothy back again in Miss Dick's school. There were lonely times and discouraged times ahead of her, she knew, and if a little sister is a responsibility, she is much more of a comfort. Mother would have Will and father, and if father went South again she would want to go too, so it wouldn't be selfish to ask for Dorothy, if——

But in her secret soul, Betty knew that the "if" was a very, very small one. Father and

mother would tell her to do what she felt was best, and she had no doubt about her final decision. She almost owed it to Mr. Morton to do anything she could toward making his splendid gift to Harding as useful as possible, and if Prexy and the directors and Emily were right she could do a great deal.

"And isn't it splendid," she reflected, "that when I've got less money than ever I can do more? That proves that money isn't everything—it isn't anything unless you are big enough to make it something. Oh, dear! What if I shouldn't 'make good,' as Will says? Why, I've just got to!"

Betty set her lips again and walked down the platform of the Cleveland station with her head so high that she almost ran into Will, who had come to meet her.

"Get along all right?" he demanded briskly.

"All right so far," Betty told him, "but there's more ahead, and it's fifty times bigger than anything I've tried before."

"Of course," Will took it placidly. "No better jobs in this world without extra work. If it wasn't a lot bigger thing than you've

tackled before, it probably wouldn't be worth your while."

Betty sighed as she surveyed him admiringly. "I suppose you're right. I wish I were a man. They're always so calm and cool. No, I don't wish that either. I'm glad I'm a girl and can get just as excited as I like, and act what you call 'all up in the air' once in a while. I don't believe things are half so much fun when a person doesn't get dreadfully excited about them. So now, Will Wales!"

## CHAPTER III

### THE CULT OF THE B. C. A.'S

WHEN Betty first unfolded what Will flip-pantly called the Morton-Prexy Proposition to the family circle, the "if" loomed very large indeed on mother's face and larger still on Dorothy's.

It would be too much for Betty, mother said. "And I don't want my little girl to get tired and dragged-out and old before she has to. There was some reason in her trying to earn money in her own way last year, but now there isn't the least sense in plunging into this project, just when the tea-shop is so nicely started and she has won the right to an easy time."

"But, mother dear," Betty interposed, "an easy time isn't the chief thing in life."

"Not exactly a cause worth living for, is it, child?" laughed father. "And being cook to the Wales family in the intervals when they happen to have a kitchen never did seem to satisfy your lofty aspirations."

"Yes, it does, father," declared Betty soberly, "but you're going to board again this winter, so I can't be cook much longer. It's just a question of where I'm needed most. That sounds dreadfully conceited, but it really isn't."

So father laughed, and said that he and mother would "talk it over," whereat Will winked wickedly at Betty in a way that meant, "Everything's settled your way, then," and hustled her off to dress for a tennis match, in which the skill of the Wales family was to be pitted against that of the Bensons. And just as the Wales family had won two sets out of a hard-fought three, father was saying diplomatically to mother on the piazza, "Well, dear, I think you're right as usual; we ought to let her go and try herself out. It's not many parents whose daughters are sought for to fill positions of such trust and responsibility."

"I hope she won't have to learn to run a typewriter like a regular secretary," sighed mother, who had never in the world meant to let herself be coaxed, by father's adroit methods, into approving or even permitting

another of those "dreadful modern departures" that her old-school training and conservative temper united to disapprove.

Father smiled at her indulgently. "If girls learned to write a copper-plate hand nowadays as they did when you were young, we shouldn't be so dependent on typewriters. Betty's scrawl is no worse than the rest. Well, now that this matter is settled and off our minds, let's walk out to the big bluff before dark."

So the discussion was closed, the "if" dwindled to nothingness once more, and two weeks after Jim Watson had assisted Mr. Morton to see Betty off in a fashion befitting that gentleman's idea of her importance, he was at the Harding station to meet her—quite without assistance.

"Was I the last straw?" he inquired gaily, as they walked down the long platform toward Main Street.

"The last straw?" repeated Betty absently. She was wondering whether the Student's Aid seniors would expect her to help meet the freshmen at their trains.

"Well, the last figure in the column that

you added up in order to estimate the possibilities of Harding as a mission field," amended Jim. "Because if I helped to turn the scales in favor of your coming here I can at last consider myself a useful member of society."

"Now don't be absurd, Jim," Betty ordered sternly. "Whatever else you do, I'm sure you'll never succeed in being a brilliant object of charity."

"Unappreciated, as usual," sighed Jim. "Nevertheless I invite you to have an ice at Cuyler's. It's going to be very awkward, Betty—your being proprietress of the Tallyho. I can never ask you to feed there."

"But you can ask all the pretty girls I'm going to introduce you to," Betty suggested, but Jim only shrugged his shoulders sceptically.

"Pretty girls are all right," he said, "but I already know as many girls here as I can manage—or I shall when they all arrive. Don't forget that I'm to help you meet Miss Helen Chase Adams to-night, and Miss Morrison to-morrow, and Miss Ayres whenever she telegraphs."



"You mustn't neglect your work," Betty warned him.

"Shan't," Jim assured her. "I've merely arranged it so I can meet all Eleanor's friends' trains. There's everything in arrangement. I generally begin my arduous duties at nine, but to-morrow seven o'clock shall see me up and at 'em—meaning the carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, sewing-machine agents, and all the rest of my menials."

"With all the extra men that Mr. Morton had sent up, can't you possibly get through before Christmas?" demanded Betty eagerly.

"I can't say yet," Jim told her. "Is it so long to wait for your sewing-machines and things?"

"Perfect ages!"

Jim frowned. Betty didn't mean to be unkind, but any one else, he reflected sadly, would have considered the personal side of the matter. Betty was a jolly girl, but all she really cared for was this confounded philanthropic job—and her tea-shop, maybe. She expected a fellow to be the same—all wrapped up in his job.

Madeline arrived, according to custom, ten minutes before her telegram, and swung up the Tally-ho steps to the lilting tune of her famous song, "Back to the College Again."

"Hello, Betty! Hello, Emily! Hello, Nora and Bridget! I say, but isn't this Improved Version of the Tally-ho almost too grand? No, I didn't write. I couldn't; I didn't decide in time. I had a special article on fresh air children to write up for a friend of Dick's, and a Woman's Page for the 'Leader,' because the person who does it usually, known to Newspaper Row as Madam Bon Ton, has gone on a vacation to Atlantic City. But I sat up all last night out at Bob's, listening to her merry tales and writing them down, and then pinching her awake to tell me more whenever I ran out of material. And I did the Woman's Page on the train coming up here. We ought to have a real celebration for me after I've worked so hard as all that just to come."

"You go ahead and plan one and we'll have it," Betty promised recklessly.

Madeline nodded, and rushed on to some-

thing else. "Is Rachel really going to teach Zoo, and is Helen Chase Adams going to adorn the English department? Christy wrote me about her appointment for History. Why, Betty, there'll be a regular Harding colony of the finest class this year. You round them all up for tea to-morrow, and I'll have the celebration ready. Never fear about that!"

"You want Mary Brooks Hinsdale, of course," Betty suggested.

Madeline nodded. "All the old bunch, but nobody who's still in college. It's to be strictly a B. C. A. party, tell them."

"Madeline," demanded Emily sternly, "do you know what that stands for, or are you going to think something up later?"

Madeline grinned placidly. "Dearest girl, as Madam Bon Ton calls all her fair correspondents, never so far forget your breeding as to give way to idle curiosity. It tends to create wrinkles. And speaking of wrinkles, do you suppose Georgia will murder or otherwise dispose of her new roommate and take me in for the night?"

They were all there the next afternoon.

Little Helen Chase Adams was just as prim and demure as ever, but the great honor that had come to her had put a permanent sparkle in her eyes, and added a comical touch of confidence to her manner. Rachel's air of quiet dignity that the head of her department approved of only made the funny stories she told of her first experiences as a "faculty" all the funnier. Christy was her old, serene, dependable self. Mary, in a very becoming new suit, smiled her "beamish" smile at everybody, and argued violently with Madeline about the relative importance of being a "small" faculty or a "big" faculty's wife.

"George Garrison Hinsdale is a genius, and he says he couldn't live without me," declared Mary modestly but firmly. Then she smiled again at the obvious humor of George Garrison Hinsdale's remark. "Of course he did live without me until he discovered me."

"We couldn't live without you either, Mary dear," Rachel assured her.

"No indeed we couldn't, you Perfect Patron," added Madeline. "And that reminds me that if you don't hustle around and do

something nice for the Tally-ho right away, you'll be expelled from the society."

"There's no rule about how often you have to do things," declared Mary indignantly, "and anyway I can't be expelled when I'm the only member. It's too utterly absurd."

"Is the Perfect Patrons a society?" demanded Christy eagerly. "Can't we join? It's not limited to faculty's wives, is it?"

"Rules for the Perfect Patron," chanted Madeline impressively. "Rule one: Only the prettiest and best-dressed faculty wife existing at Harding is eligible. Rule two: In estimating Perfection patronizing the firm is counted against patronizing the menu. That's where little Mary always meets her Waterloo."

"I do not, and anyway those rules aren't half so funny as the real ones that you made up first," interpolated Mary sweetly.

"Well, I've forgotten the real ones. Anyway, we don't need Perfect Patrons nowadays as much as we did when we were young and poor, instead of prosperous and almost too elegant. So suppose we attend to the organization of the B. C. A.'s."

"Is that a society, too?" demanded Helen the practical.

"No, it's a cult," explained Madeline curtly.

"What's a cult?"

"What does it stand for?"

We're all 'Merry Hearts.' What's the use of any more clubs?"

Madeline met the avalanche of questions calmly.

"A cult is a highly exclusive club—nothing vulgar and common about a cult, like the Perfect Patrons' Society, with its crowded membership list. As for the B. C. A. part, you can take a turn at guessing that. If any one gets it right we shall know that it's too easy and that we'd better change to Greek letters or something. When you've guessed what it's the cult of, of course you'll understand the object of organizing it."

"Very lucid indeed," said Christy solemnly.

"Don't try your patronizing faculty airs on me," Madeline warned her. "I may say in passing that in my humble opinion no faculty should be caught belonging to a nice frivolous affair like the 'Merry Hearts.' A

kindly desire not to exclude our faculty friends of 19— from our councils was of course my chief object in promoting the more dignified cult of the B. C. A.'s."

"B. C. A.—Betty Can't Argue." Mary, who had been lost in thought, burst out with her solution. "She can't, you know. She always smiles and says, 'I don't know why I think so, but I do.'"

"Beans Cooked Admirably," suggested Emily. "Then the obvious entertainment would be Saturday suppers à la Boston."

"Butter Costs Awfully," amended Christy. "Then the obvious procedure would be to open a savings account."

"Better Come Again," was Rachel's contribution. "That sounds nice and sociable and Madelineish."

"Thanks for the compliment. You're getting the least little speck of a bit warm," Madeline told her encouragingly.

"Brilliant Collegians' Association," interposed Betty eagerly. "That must be right, because you're all brilliant but me, and I'm the exception that proves it. Have I guessed, Madeline?"

Madeline shook her head. "Certainly not. Brilliance should be seen, not heard, Betty, my child. Besides, according to my well-known theory of names, a good one should bring out subtle, unsuspected qualities. That's why editors get so excited, and even annoyed, about the titles of my stories; they aren't generally subtle enough themselves to get my subtle points."

"Well, I may say that I sympathize with the editors," declared Mary feelingly. "Hurry and give a guess, Helen Chase, and then maybe she'll tell us."

"Bromides Can't Attend," said Helen timidly. "I suppose that's wrong too."

"Wildly," Madeline assured her.

"And also senseless, I should say," added Mary. "What in the world are Bromides?"

"People who ask foolish questions," explained Christy, "like that one you've just propounded. The others are Sulphites. Get the book from Helen, who had it presented to her to read on the train, and then you'll know all about it. Now, Madeline, tell us quick."

Madeline shrugged her shoulders and



stirred her tea with a provoking air of leisureliness. "It's nothing to get excited about. Really, after all your ingenious guesses, the humble reality sounds very tame and obvious. We are the B. C. A.'s—the Back-to-the-College Again's. It sounds simple, but like all my titles it involves deep subtleties. Why are we, of all the 19—'s who would give their best hats to be here, 'elected' to honor Harding with our presence? What have we in common? The answer is of course the sign of the cult and the mark of eligibility. It's rather late to-day, so probably we'd better postpone the discussion until the next weekly tea-drinking."

"Oh, do we have weekly tea-drinkings?" asked Christy. "Goodie! now tell our fortunes, Madeline."

"Yes, that's a lot more fun than a silly old discussion," said Betty, holding out her cup.

"Wait a minute, Betty," interrupted the methodical Rachel. "She hasn't told us the object of the cult yet."

Madeline swept the circle with a despairing glance. "As if perfectly good tea and talking about that ever-interesting subject, Our-

selves, wasn't 'object' enough for anybody. But you can have an 'object' if you like. I don't mind, only you know I always did refuse to get excited over objects and causes and all that sort of thing." Madeline reached for Betty's cup, and promptly discovered a tall, fair-haired "suitor" in the bottom of it. "He has an object," she declared. "Can you guess what it is? It's Betty Wales."

"Well, I'm sure Betty's a worthy object for any suitor or any cult," Rachel declared. "If you don't believe it, watch her blush."

"I'm not blushing," Betty defended herself vigorously. "I'm only thinking—thinking how nice it would be if the B. C. A.'s would take me for an object. I shall need lots of help and advice, and maybe other things, and I shall make you give them to me anyway, so you'd better elect me to be your object, and then you won't mind so much."

"I shall be much relieved, for my part," declared Madeline. "An object with yellow curls ——"

"And a dimple," put in Mary.

"Isn't likely to be very much of a bore,"

Madeline finished, and turned her attention to tea-grounds again, discovering so many suitors, European trips, and splendid presents, that Christy, who was house teacher at the Westcott, disgraced herself by being late to dinner. As for Mary Brooks Hinsdale, in the excitement of recounting it all to her husband, she utterly forgot that she had promised to chaperon the Westcott House dance and had to be sent for by an irate and anxious committee, who, however, forgave her everything when she arrived in her most becoming pink evening gown, declaring fervently that she should be heart-broken if she couldn't dance every single number.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GRASSHOPPER WAGER

THE two weeks after college opened were the most confused, crowded, delightful, and difficult ones that Betty Wales had ever lived through. There seemed to be twice as many freshmen as there had ever been in Harding before. The town swarmed with them and with their proud and anxious fathers and mothers and sisters and aunts. They fell upon the Tally-ho Tea-Shop with such ardor that Emily was<sup>3</sup> in despair—or would have been if Betty hadn't assumed charge of the dinner hour herself and adroitly impressed Madeline with the literary value of seeing life from the cashier's desk at lunch time.

Miss Dick's school opened a fortnight after Harding, and then there was Dorothy to meet—the Bensons had brought her east with them on their way to New York—and the little girl was to be established this time in the boarding department, to the arrangements of

which she immediately took a perverse dislike. Considering that she was the youngest boarder and the pet and darling of the whole school, this seemed quite unreasonable, particularly as all the year before she had teased to be a "boarder." But Eugenia Ford took most of this worry off Betty's hands, getting up early every morning to go over for a before-breakfast story, told while she combed out the Smallest Sister's tangled curls, and never forgetting to appear in the evening at the exactly right minute to deliver a good-night kiss.

"Don't thank me, please," she begged Betty imploringly. "Feeling as if I had to do it makes her seem a little more like my very own. Just think!" Eugenia's eyes filled, but she went on bravely. "I might be doing it for my very own little sister, if a dreadful French 'bonne' hadn't been careless about a cold she took. How can mothers ever care more about having dinner parties and dances and going to the opera, Miss Wales, than about playing with their babies and seeing that they're all right? My mother is like Peter Pan, I think. She will never grow up. And she never liked dolls when she was little,

so naturally she didn't care to play with us." Eugenia flushed, suddenly realizing that she was indulging in rather strange confidences. "My mother is a great beauty, Miss Wales, and awfully bright and entertaining. I'm very, very proud of her. And if Dorothy is the least bit sick or tired or unhappy on a day when you don't see her, I'll be sure to notice and tell you, so you can feel perfectly safe."

Of course the greatest problem, and one that nobody but Betty could do much to cope with, was the launching of the secretaryship. The secretary had been provided with a cozy little office, very businesslike with its roller-topped desk, a big filing cabinet, and a typewriter stand, tucked away in a corner of the Main Building; but beyond that the trustful directors apparently expected her to shift for herself. Betty promptly interviewed the two faculty members of the board, who smiled at her eagerness and anxiety to please, and advised her not to be in a hurry, but to begin with the obvious routine work—that meant interviewing and investigating the needs and the deserts of the girls who had applied for

loans from the Student's Aid—and to branch out gradually later, as opportunity offered.

"But I can't do just that," Betty told the second B. C. A. tea-drinking, "because it's no more than they did themselves before they had a secretary. It would be like stealing to take their money for just that."

"Oh, I don't know," advised Madeline lazily. "If they want to make it a snap course, isn't that entirely their affair?"

"Why, Madeline Ayres," objected Helen Adams solemnly, "it's a charitable enterprise. I don't suppose snap courses are exactly wrong, though they never amount to much, and so they waste the time of the ones that take them. But it would be positively wrong for the Student's Aid to waste its money, when so many more poor girls want educations than can have them."

Madeline listened, frowning intently. "'The Immorality of the Snap Course'—I'll do a little essay on that for the *alumnæ* department of the 'Argus.' It will rattle the editor awfully, but she will almost have to print it, after having teased and teased me for a few words from my facile and distinguished

pen. Thanks a lot, Helen, for the idea. I'd give you the credit in a foot-note, only it might scare girls away from your courses."

"Aren't you thankful, girls," began Mary, waving her teacup majestically around the circle, "that only one of us is a literary light? I wonder if real authors are as everlastingly given to changing the subject back to their own affairs as is our beloved Madeline. Now let's get down to business ——"

"Hear! Hear!" cried Madeline. "Little Mary will now voice her own and George Garrison Hinsdale's sentiments on the immorality of the snap course. Lend me a pencil, somebody, so I can take notes of her valued ideas."

"The business," continued Mary, scornfully ignoring the interruption, "is to find more work for Betty, so she can earn her munificent salary properly. The meeting is now open for suggestions."

"Well, Mary, fire away," ordered Madeline briskly. "Of course a person with your head for business is simply overflowing with brilliant thoughts."

"You think you're being sarcastic, but just



the same," declared Mary modestly, "I have got a head for business ——"

"Witness the way you used to make your accounts balance when you were in college, and the way your allowance lasted," put in Rachel laughingly.

Mary smiled reminiscently. "My dear Rachel, a head for business is entirely different from being able to remember what you've spent. And even if I remembered, I couldn't add it all up. But that's bookkeeping, not business. As for using up my allowance ahead of time, I'm naturally an expansionist, and where would any respectable business be, may I ask you, if it didn't go out every now and then and get more capital to expand with? I expanded the possibilities of the Harding course, and my father paid the bills; unfortunately there are always bills," concluded Mary with a sigh.

"Do you still finish your allowance on the fourth of the month?" demanded Christy.

Mary shook her pretty head smilingly. "Never—for the good and sufficient reason that George Garrison Hinsdale understands me too well to give me an allowance."

"The business of this meeting," chanted Madeline sonorously, "is not, as you might suppose, a discussion of little Mary's domestic and financial affairs."

"Well, the girls asked me questions," declared Mary indignantly, "and I didn't know that there was any such awful rush. I'm not trying to gain time while I think up an inspiration, as you—well, I won't start any more quarrels. I'll only say that I'm not delaying in hopes of having an idea for Betty, because I've already got one. I think she ought to advertise."

"How?"

"Why?"

"Sounds as if she was a breakfast food or a patent medicine."

"She's an employment bureau at present," explained Mary serenely, "and when Morton Hall is ready to open she'll be a house agent. She's got to let people know that the bulletin-board in the gym basement is a back member, because she has it beaten cold. She impersonates the great and only link between the talented poor and the idle rich in this community."

"That sounds well," admitted Christy, "but how in the world is she to do it—be the great and only link, I mean?"

Mary shrugged her shoulders, and began putting on her gloves, which were new and fitted beautifully. "I leave all that to you," she said. "I really must go now. Miss Ferris is having an intellectual dinner party for a philosopher from Boston, and we're asked. I always make a point of wearing my prettiest things to their intellectual dinners—it's the least and the most that I can do—and one's prettiest things do take ages to get into. Good-bye, my dears."

"She's hit it, as usual," said Rachel admiringly, when Mary's trim little figure had rustled out of sight. "The important thing to do is to make the girls realize what you're here for. Most of them know that you're the new Student's Aid secretary——"

"But they don't know how to use you in their business," Christy took her up.

"And the ones that need you most will always be too scared," put in Helen Adams earnestly. "When I was a junior"—she blushed a little at her tardy admission—"my

mother lost some money, and we didn't have as much interest to live on. I thought I might have to leave college, and I wondered if the Student's Aid would help me to stay. But I was too scared to ask. I started twice to go and see one of the faculty directors, but I just couldn't screw up my courage. And then mother sold a farm that she'd wanted to get rid of for years, so it was all right. But—well, I wasn't ashamed to ask for help; I was just scared," ended Helen incoherently.

"Results of investigation up to date," began Emily, who was dividing her time between the cashier's desk and the B. C. A.'s table. "First, let people know what you are here for; secondly, take away the scared feeling from girls, who, as well as you can guess, may need help; third—this is original with me—get the girls who have money properly excited about having things done for them. I can tell you, I used to bless the B's for the sentiment they created in favor of hiring somebody to sew on skirt braids and mend stockings."

"Well, the B's aren't the only ones who can create sentiments," said Madeline. "Georgia's very good at it, and the Dutton twins

are regular geniuses. Fluffy Dutton could make people so wildly enthusiastic over the binomial theorem that they'd be ready to die for it if she asked them to."

"Then get them started on Betty," ordered Rachel. "Madeline Ayres is hereby elected to enthuse all the champion enthusers on the subject of the enjoyability of being mended up by somebody else."

Madeline bowed gravely. "I hereby accept the chairmanship of the committee on Proper Excitement of the Idle Rich, and I would suggest Rachel Morrison as chairman of the committee on Proper Encouragement of the Timid Poor, and Christy Mason to head one on Proper Exploitation of Miss Betty Wales, the eager, earnest, and insufficiently employed Student's Aid Secretary."

"If I might humbly suggest something at this point," laughed Christy, "it would be that Betty might like to invent her own committees and choose the chairmen of them."

"Oh, no indeed," cried Betty heartily. "You all have such splendid ideas and Madeline has such lovely names for things. Please

go on and think of something else. I haven't dared to say a word all this time, because I was so afraid that you would stop."

"That's the proper spirit for an Object." Madeline patted Betty's shoulder encouragingly. "Accept the goods the B. C. A.'s provide. Instead of not earning your salary, my child, you're going to give the Student's Aid the biggest kind of a bargain. Besides one small secretary (with curls and a dimple) they're getting the invaluable assistance of at least six prominent graduates, and any number of influential college girls. If that's not a run for their money, I should like to know what they want."

"Oh, they haven't acted dissatisfied," explained Betty hastily. "It was only I that was worried."

"Well, I should like to know what you want, then," amended Madeline with severity. Then she smiled a self-satisfied little smile. "It's all right to ask 'What's in a name?' There's nothing much in some names, but if these committees of mine aren't rather extra popular on account of their stylish headings, I shall stop trying to make a reputation for

clever titles and devote my life to producing horrible commonplaces for the Woman's Page of the Sunday papers. I'm going up to the campus this minute to talk to Georgia and Fluffy Dutton. Come along, Rachel, and get your committee started too."

"Wait a minute, Madeline," Emily broke in. "Why not organize a sort of council of all the committees, and have a meeting of it here some afternoon next week to talk over the situation?"

Madeline stared at her sadly. "If you think I'm going to spoil my perfectly good committee by asking it to meet, you don't understand the first principles of my sweet and simple nature. The last way to properly excite people is to hold stupid meetings. Come along, Rachel, before my beautiful enthusiasm vanishes."

The next morning Fluffy Dutton appeared in "Psych. 6" ten minutes after the hour, with a yard of black mohair braid trailing conspicuously from her note-book.

The lecture was hopelessly dull, and the class concentrated its wandering attention on the braid which, with a notice pinned

to one end, traveled slowly up and down the room.

“For those wishing to be neat  
Here’s a plan that can’t be beat.  
Pin your name upon this braid  
You’ll a needy student aid.  
Tell her where and when to call  
And she’ll do it—that is all.  
She’ll rip the old braid, sew on new,  
And prompt return your skirt to you.”

So read the rhyming notice, and below it was printed in large letters, “Lowest Prices for all Repairing, Mending, and Plain Sewing (including Gym Suits).”

When the strip of braid got back to Fluffy it looked like the tail of a kite, with its collection of orders scattered artistically up and down its length.

“Yes, I wrote the rhyme,” Fluffy admitted modestly, when the class was dismissed. “Wrote it between breakfast and chapel. What made me late to Psych. was buying the braid. Georgia wrote one too, and we are racing each other to see who gets the largest number of orders. Oh, yes, I suppose they do need the work—or the money rather. But



the thing that appeals to me is the impression I shall make on my mother when I go home all neat and tidy and mended up for once. Haven't you a freshman sister? Well, put her down for a gym suit, that's a dear! Georgia's going to catch me a dozen grasshoppers if I win. I hate catching things so—my hair always blows in my eyes."

"And what if Georgia wins?"

"Oh, then I've got to catch her a dozen grasshoppers," said Fluffy resignedly. "But I don't care much, because I shall hire it done, and that will be all for the good of the cause. But I can't believe that she will win, because gym suits count as three skirt braids, and positions for waitresses count as five. I'm going to get a lot of those from eleven to twelve. Georgia is furious because this is her lab. morning, and she can't get a good start." And Fluffy trailed her skirt braid over to Junior Lit. where she got so many orders that she had to unpin them, place them on file, so to speak, in the front of her shirt-waist, and start over.

It may be reprehensible to wager grasshoppers; but, as Fluffy pointed out to some hu-

mane friend, they were doomed in any case, and there was a piquant flavor of adventure about the whole proceeding that appealed strongly to one type of the Harding mind. The committee on the Encouragement (and discovery) of the Timid Poor convened hastily that same evening in Betty's shiny new office, and discovered that while their day's work had necessarily been less spectacular than their rivals', it had been equally effective. There would be no trouble in matching workers to skirt braids.

"But there'll be all kinds of trouble about flunked courses," announced Eugenia Ford solemnly, "unless we remember to pay better attention in 'Psych. 6.' He gave out a written lesson for to-morrow on purpose, because there was so much whispering and rustling around to-day."

"The more flunking, the more tutoring," suggested a pretty junior, and blushed very pink when she remembered that Rachel Morrison was on the faculty.

"That was a foolish remark," she added apologetically. "For my part, I honestly think there'll be less flunking than usual. It

makes you more in earnest about your own college course when you see how some girls value it, and what they'll sacrifice to get it. Come along, Eugenia, and let's begin to burn the midnight oil."

## CHAPTER V

### REINFORCEMENTS

THE initiation of Babbie Hildreth, which had to be over in time for the participants to meet Eleanor Watson's train, was the feature of the next B. C. A. tea-drinking, held two days ahead of time in honor of the double reinforcement to the ranks of 19—.

"I hope you're all satisfied. I've come up here out of pure curiosity about this old cult," announced Babbie, when they were settled cozily in Flying Hoof's stall. "You all wrote the most maddening letters—it was arranged, I know, what each one should say, so that I'd keep getting crazier and crazier to be let into the secret."

"Didn't you rather want to see your elegant new tea-shop?" demanded Rachel innocently.

"Ye-es"—Babbie flushed,—“of course I did. It's lovely, isn't it? Nora must appreciate her splendid kitchen ——”

"Why, you haven't seen the kitchen yet, Babbie," cried Helen Adams reproachfully. "I've been with you every minute since you came."

"Well, I can guess what it's like, can't I?" Babbie defended herself.

"Babbie Hildreth," demanded Madeline, sternly, "when were you up here last?"

"In August," Babbie admitted sulkily, "if you must know. My Aunt Belinda brought me up in her car." She brightened in spite of herself. "Aunt Belinda is so lovely and romantic. She thinks it's all right for me to come up and see Robert, since he can't come very often to see me. Mother doesn't, exactly. But she was terribly amused at this B. C. A. cult. She told me to run along and satisfy my 'satiabile curiosity' if I wanted to. I—oh, excuse me one minute, please!"

Having thoughtfully secured a seat at the end of the stall, Babbie had been the first to observe a dark object in the act of vaulting the Tally-ho's back fence. She intercepted the dark object on the front walk, and accompanied it forthwith to Paradise, where the tea

and marmalade that you hunger for and the curiosity that you feel about mysterious "cults" may both, under favorable circumstances, be forgotten as utterly as if they had never been.

So the B. C. A.'s amused themselves by inventing some stunning "features" for a formal initiation ceremony to be held later for Eleanor and Babbie together, ate Babbie's share of the muffins and jam, congratulated themselves on the way they had "set Betty up in business," as Mary Brooks modestly put it, and waited so long for their beloved "Object" to appear—it was an office-hours afternoon, and Betty had refused to desert her post even for a B. C. A. tea-drinking—that they had to run all the way to the station, only to discover, on arriving there breathless and disheveled, that the train was an hour late.

"So we might just as well have preserved the dignity of the Harding faculty and wives," sighed Mary, straightening her new fall hat. "It's all your fault, Betty Wales. You said you'd come in time to go to the train, and we kept thinking you'd arrive upon the scene

every single minute. And the longer we waited the more we ate, and then the harder it was to run."

"Some one came in to see me just at the last minute," Betty explained. "I couldn't say that I had an engagement when it was just larks."

Betty let the cult and its friends get all the orders they would for skirt braids and gym suits, and all possible data about needy girls; but she never confided in them, in return—a conservative attitude which Madeline considered "distinctly snippy."

"I just know you're concealing all sorts of stunning short stories about your person," she declared. "Now Bob tells me lovely things about her fresh-air kids. She isn't such a clam."

But Betty was equally impervious to being called a clam and to fulfilling her obligations toward Madeline's Literary Career. The humor and the pathos that came into the secretary's office she regarded as state secrets, to be never so much as hinted at, even to her dearest friends.

"But it sometimes seems as if I should just

burst with it all," she told Jim Watson, who poked his head in her door nearly every day, and rapidly withdrew it again if any one else was with her. "It isn't only the girls who come on regular business that are so queer, but the ones that come just for advice. Eugenia Ford has the strangest ideas about my being able to straighten things out, and she's told her crowd, and they've told their friends. Every day some girl walks in and says, 'Are you the one who will answer questions?' Then I say who I am, and suggest that maybe she wants her class officer. But she says no, she means me; and maybe she's a freshman who has decided that she can't live another day without her collie dog, and maybe she's a senior, who has cut too much and is frightened silly about being sent home, and maybe she's a pretty, muddle-headed little sophomore who's in love with a Winsted man and doesn't dare tell her father and mother, and is thinking of eloping. Oh, Jim, these are just possible cases, you understand, not real ones. But you mustn't ever breathe a word of what I've said."

"I'm as silent as a tomb," Jim would as-



sure her gravely each time that something too nearly "real" slipped out.

"Well, you're the only one I ever do burst out to," Betty assured him, "except when I decide that it's only right to ask Miss Ferris or Prexy or some responsible person like them for advice. I don't know why I should talk so much more about it to you, except that you don't know any of the girls and never will, whereas Madeline would be sure to write up anything funny that she heard, and Rachel and Christy and Helen are on the faculty and the girls who come to see me might be in their classes, and if Emily Davis knew she'd want terribly to tell the rest."

"All girls are leaky," Jim would announce sententiously at this point in the argument. "Besides, I've been a secretary myself. My job was exactly the same as yours in the matter of holding confidential information. Now when are you coming over to see about that linen closet?"

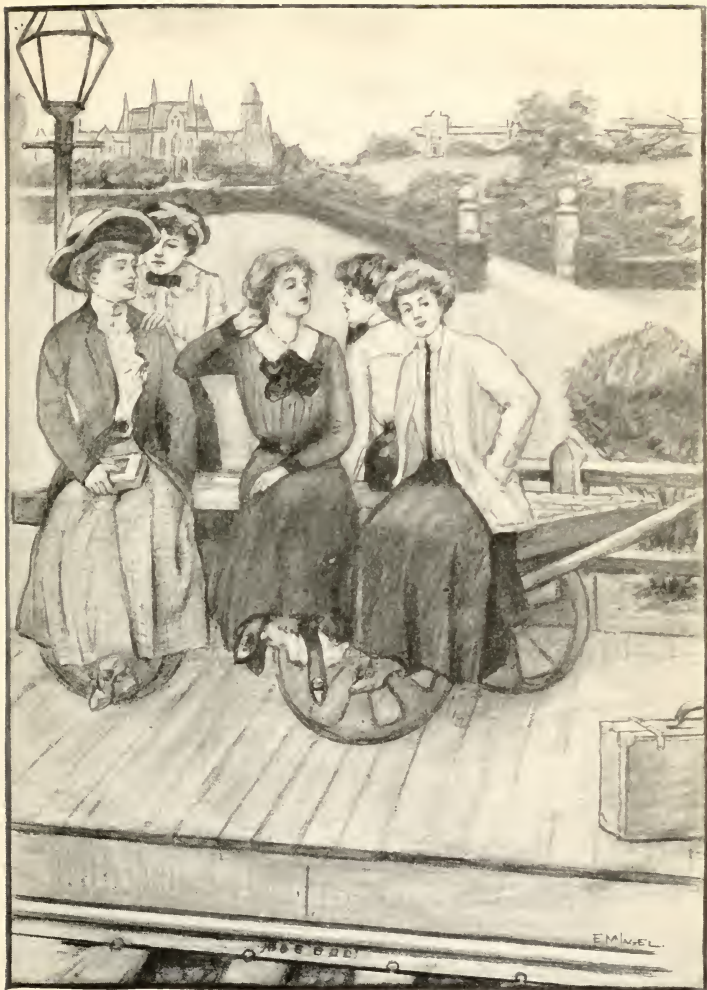
It was really not at all surprising, considering how highly Jasper J. Morton valued her opinion, that his architectural representative found it necessary to consult Betty Wales al-

most every day on some problem growing out of the peculiar adaptabilities and arrangements of Morton Hall.

The B. C. A.'s paced the station platform till they were tired, and then they further outraged the dignity of the "faculty and wives" by sitting down to rest on a baggage truck, and swinging their feet off the edge. It was thus that Jim, who had taken the precaution to telephone the ticket agent before leaving home, found them a few minutes before Eleanor's arrival.

"Do make yourselves as fascinating as you can," he implored them all naively, "so she'll stay. She's been taking singing lessons lately at home, and her teacher had a New York teacher visiting her, and both of them got excited about Eleanor's voice. So now she's written about some crazy plan she has for a winter in New York, studying music. That's all right after Christmas, maybe, but at present I want her right here, and the person who can make her see it that way wins my everlasting gratitude."

"You'll be likely to win your own ever-



SITTING DOWN TO REST ON A BAGGAGE TRUCK



lasting gratitude, I should say," Madeline told him. "Eleanor was always expatiating on the charms of her brother Jim."

Jim blushed. "That's all right, but I have a feeling that she's keener about some other fellow's charms by this time. Plenty of fellows are certainly keen about hers. But lately she doesn't pay any attention to them—just goes in for slumming and improving her mind, and now her voice. So give her a good time, and get her excited about your mysterious club, and when she begins on the earnestness of life and the self-improvement business, ring in all Miss Betty's philanthropies. And I'll come in strong on the lonely brother act. I say, there she is this minute!"

Jim gave a running jump on to the platform of a passing car and had his innings while the girls, taken unaware, scrambled down from their truck and hurried after him.

It didn't seem as if it would be hard to keep Eleanor. There was the little awkward moment at first, that even the best of friends experience when they haven't seen each other for over a year; and then such a babel of talk

and laughter, of questions asked all at once and never answered, of explanations interrupted by exclamations, and rendered wholly incoherent by hugs and kisses.

"You haven't changed a bit," they told her.

"Yes, you have! You're prettier than ever."

"When will you sing for us?"

"Have you done any writing lately?"

"Are you too tired to see the Tally-ho right away?"

"You're to live in Rachel's little white house, you know, and we're all quarreling about when we can have you for dinner."

"Picnics! I should think so. As many as you want."

"Don't those infants make the absurdest imitations of faculties?"

"How do you like little Mary's new hat?"

They walked up Main Street chattering like magpies and forgetting to turn out for anybody, Jim bringing up the rear with Eleanor's suit case in one hand and a book of Babbie's and an untidy bundle of manuscript that Mad-

eline had dropped in her excitement tucked under the other arm.

Christy invited the whole party to dinner at the Tally-ho, and they decided that it was quite warm enough to eat in the top story of the Peter Pan annex. Jim had lighted all the Chinese lanterns and hauled up two baskets full of dinner, while the girls chattered merrily on as if they never meant to stop, when Babbie and Mr. Thayer appeared, sauntering slowly down the hill from the direction of Paradise. They didn't seem at all ashamed of the way Babbie had been snatched away from her own initiation party, but shouted up that they were simply starved to death, and cheerfully assuming that there was dinner enough and room enough for all comers, they annexed themselves to Christy's party.

"You're lucky to have a sister to look after you," Mr. Thayer told Jim. "I opened a big club-house for my mill people last winter, just to please these young ladies, and how do they pay me? By cold, cruel neglect."

"Nonsense!" Madeline contradicted him cheerfully. "We gave you a splendid start. That's all we do for anybody."

"We're all so busy," Betty added quickly. "But we are just as interested as we ever were. Isn't the girl I sent you managing well?"

Mr. Thayer nodded. "Only she can't seem to discover a genius who's able to take hold of the prize class."

"Is that the one my adorable Rafael is in?" demanded Madeline. "Because if it is, I might ——"

"It is, but you can't have it," Babbie told her firmly. "They changed teachers four times last year, after you dropped them so unceremoniously. This time they're to have some one who will stick, aren't they, Robert?"

Mr. Thayer looked uncomfortable, not wishing either to contradict Babbie or to slight Madeline's offer. "It's better, of course, but perhaps Miss Madeline will stick this time."

"Robert!" Babbie's tone was very hopeless. "Can't you understand that Madeline is about as likely to stick as Prexy is to dance a horn-pipe at to-morrow's chapel?" She sighed deeply. "It must be terrible to be a reformer; you have to be so hopeful about people's turning over a new leaf—whether it's Madeline sticking, or a dreadful old



Frenchman beating his wife, or the angelic-looking Rafael learning his alphabet."

"Haven't they learned that yet?" asked Madeline incredulously.

"Certainly not," retorted Babbie. "You jabbered Italian all the time to them, and that spoiled them so that they never would study for the other teachers."

"I regret my reprehensible familiarity with their mother tongue," announced Madeline grandiloquently, "and I hereby make due reparation." Her glance wandered around the table. "I elect Eleanor Watson to take the prize class."

"Tell me about it," Eleanor asked. "I don't understand at all. I didn't know there were any foreigners in Harding."

So they told her about Factory Hill, about Young-Man-Over-the-Fence and his Twelfth-Night party that accidentally started the fund for the club-house, about the education clause in the new factory laws, the club organization, which was now so efficiently managed by the Student's Aid's prize beneficiary—a senior who had earned every bit of her college course—and finally about Rafael and Giu-

seppi and Pietro and the other Italian boys, who scorned their French and Polish, Portuguese and German comrades, and insisted upon their own little club—a concession in return for which they played truant, refused to study or pay attention, and quarreled violently on the slightest provocation. They would have to be dropped from the factory pay-roll, according to the new law, if they did not speedily mend their ways and learn to read and write.

“Why, I should be almost afraid to be left alone with them,” Eleanor exclaimed at the end of the recital. “Do they carry daggers?”

“No, they’re not quite so barbaric as that,” Mr. Thayer told her. “They are just lively boys, who’ve been brought up with strong race prejudices and no chance to have the jolly good times that would make them forget their feuds and revolts. They work hard because their fathers make them, and because it’s the regular way of living for them. But being forced to study they consider the most bitter tyranny. The factory inspectors have had their cases up twice now, and if I can’t make a good report on them at Christmas I

shall have to let them go. I hate to, because they can't get other work here, and if they leave their homes and friends, nine out of the ten will probably go straight to the bad."

"There's your chance, Eleanor," Jim told her eagerly.

"But, Jim, I can't 'stick,' as Babbie calls it. I'm here only for a little visit. My music——"

"Go down every week for a lesson," Jim ordered easily. "Don't miss a chance at a ripping New England autumn with all this good society thrown in."

"Even if you're not staying long, do take them off my hands for a few weeks," begged Mr. Thayer. "They're afraid of me and sulk stupidly if I try to teach them, and they've been rather too much for any of the girls who've tried."

"Then what makes you think ——" began Eleanor.

"You've been elected, Eleanor," Madeline broke in impatiently. "That settles it. You can manage them the way you managed that newsboys' club in Denver. Oh, I've heard ——" as Eleanor flushed and protested.

"That's why I elected you. Now we want some songs. Where's her guitar, Monsieur Jacques? If Rafael won't learn the alphabet any other way, you can sing it to him."

So Eleanor laughingly consented to meet the Terrible Ten, as Babbie called them, the next night, and the Ten won her heart, as Jim had hoped they would.

Eleanor never mentioned the alphabet. She merely inquired of the circle of dark faces who had heard of Robin Hood, and receiving only sullen negatives, she began a story. One by one the sullen faces grew eager. At a most exciting point, where Robin and his band were on the point of playing a fine joke on the Sheriff of Nottingham, she stopped abruptly.

"I'm tired," she said. "That's all for to-night."

"You tella more next day?" demanded the graceless Rafael. He had fairly drowned out the first part of the tale with muttered threats upon Pietro, who had hidden his cap.

Eleanor hesitated diplomatically. "Would you really like to hear the rest?" she asked finally.

Rafael's brown eyes met hers, clouded with supreme indifference, and his expressive shoulders shrugged coldly.

"Oh, maybe," he admitted.

"Then what will you do for me? You can't expect me to amuse you big boys the whole evening, while you do nothing to amuse me in return. This is a club, you know. In a club everybody does something for everybody else."

"What you like?" demanded Rafael, with suppressed eagerness.

"Yes, what you like?" echoed Pietro, the quarrel between them quite forgotten.

"I'm very fond of pictures," announced Eleanor gravely. "If you'd each draw a picture of Robin Hood on the blackboard over there—here are a lot of colored chalks—and put his name under it—Robin, we'll call him for short—why, I should think you'd done your full share."

The Terrible Ten exchanged bewildered glances, and one after another slouched nonchalantly to the chalk box. The colored crayons were a novelty, nine of the Terrible Ten were born artists, and the tenth—Rafael,

whose crushed hand was still stiff and awkward—was pathetically anxious to satisfy the new teacher's strange demands. His Robin Hood looked like a many colored smutch, with a sprawling green frame around it—that was Sherwood forest, thrown in for good measure.

"Don't forget the name," Eleanor reminded them calmly, when, the pictures finished, the artists began to exchange furtive glances again in regard to the next requirement.

"You make lil' sample on mine," suggested Rafael craftily.

"No, I'll make one up here," Eleanor amended, "where everybody can see it."

And to her surprise the Terrible Ten, with many sighs and grimaces, and much smutting out of mistakes with wetted fingers, toilsomely accomplished the writing.

"Now," Eleanor said, "let's talk for a while before we go home. There's a bag of peanuts under my coat. Will you bring it, please, Pietro?" She took the bag and grouped the boys around the long table. "Now let's play a game while we eat. I'll ask questions, and the one that answers quickest gets some peanuts. Listen now: if I give Pietro six

peanuts and Giovanni five, how many will that be?"

Dazed looks on the faces of the Ten, followed by anxious finger-counting.

"Fifteen," hazarded Pietro.

"Nix, nine," shrieked Rafael.

Giuseppi got it right, and to make sure they counted at the top of their lungs, while Eleanor passed him, one by one, the eleven peanuts.

"Now, if he gives Pietro two ——" began Eleanor.

"Aw, come off. You say you gif to me," interrupted Giuseppi. "I wish to keep my peanuts."

Eleanor gravely accepted the amendment. "All right." She counted out eleven peanuts, and held them up in her hand. "Now I have eleven peanuts. If I give Pietro two"—she suited the action to the word—"how many have I left?"

More frantic finger-counting, and this time Giovanni got the prize.

Then Rafael and his six unfed comrades burst into angry protests. "You give Pietro two for nix. He never guess right."

"No fair that he gets some for nix."

Eleanor met the crisis calmly. "They're my peanuts, so I can give him two if I like. But wait a minute. See what I do now. I give Rafael two, you two, you two, and you, and you, and you, and you. How many is that? The one that guesses right gets as many as all you boys have together. Quick now."

Efforts to eat the peanuts and count them at the same time resulted in absolute pandemonium.

"Let's have paper," Eleanor suggested. "That's easier than doing it all in your head."

Before the evening was over the passing out of peanuts two by two had accomplished the learning of the "two-times" table, as far as two times ten.

"Who promises to come next time?" asked Eleanor, while they waited awkwardly for her to gather up her wraps.

"Me."

"Me."

"Me."

"You bet I do."

"Dis club is O. K."

"You doan fergit the story?"



"Not if you'll all try to remember the 'two-times' table," Eleanor promised, shaking hands gravely all around.

"She's de peach fer sure. Gotta all demoder teachers beat," announced Pietro on the steps.

"Don't you call her no peach. She's a lovely lady," corrected Rafael, aiming a deft blow with his left hand.

"Ain't a lada a peach?" challenged Pietro, dancing out of reach.

"All right for Italian girl, not good enough for lika her," Rafael answered fiercely.

"Wonder if she bring more dem peanuts next week," speculated Nicolo.

"She ain't no millionaire, maybe." Rafael turned upon him scowling. "But doan you dare fergit the two-times, 'cause den she'll fergit Robin. I killa de kid dat fergits."

Rafael was evidently the Ten's leader. They received his dire threat in awed silence, and tramped off, chanting the two-times table with a vigor that reached Eleanor, reporting her evening's experiences to Mr. Thayer, and clinched her wavering determination into a promise to stay for at least a month in Harding.

## CHAPTER VI

### FRISKY FENTON'S MARTYRDOM

THE Smallest Sister was reconciled at last to being a boarder.

"I've got a new chum," she announced eagerly, coming to see her sister on an afternoon which Betty, feeling more than usually "caught-up" with her other activities, had decided to devote to Dorothy.

"What's happened to Shirley Ware?" asked Betty.

"We're mad at each other—at least I'm mad at Shirley." The Smallest Sister assumed an air of injured innocence. "We don't speak any more, except to say good-morning at breakfast if Miss Dick is looking right at us."

"But that's so silly, Dorothy," Betty protested. "Shirley is a dear little girl, and if you've quarreled it's probably more your fault than hers. Tell me all about it, dearie."

"Well," Dorothy began sulkily, "I'd just as

soon tell you, only Frisky—that's Francisca Fenton, my new chum—she asked us all not to say anything more about it. I'm not the only one that's mad at Shirley. Nearly every single girl at Miss Dick's is too,—only being chums with her makes it worse for me, because I'm so ashamed of her."

"Who is this Francisca Fenton?" asked Betty, digressing diplomatically for a moment from the main issue. "I never even heard you speak of her before. Haven't you become chums very fast?"

Dorothy nodded importantly. "She's one of the older girls. Maybe you haven't heard me speak of her, but I've just nearly worshipped her ever since she came last fall. The other day when I cried because I was so mad at Shirley and so ashamed of her, why, she came and asked me to be chums. Her chum was in it too, you see. I mean she took sides with Shirley."

"Sides about what?" asked Betty innocently.

"About being a tattle-tale, of course," Dorothy began, and stopped short, setting her pretty little mouth in a straight, determined

line. "Frisky asked me not to talk about it, and I shan't," she announced. "So don't you try to make me."

Betty was mending a pair of Dorothy's gloves. She stuck the needle into the rip, folded the gloves, and silently began upon the holes in her own stockings. Dorothy pretended to look out the window, but she kept one eye on Betty, who appeared completely absorbed in her work.

"It's a lovely day," the Smallest Sister observed presently.

No answer.

"Aren't we going for our walk pretty soon?" demanded the Smallest Sister, after a polite interval.

There was another polite interval, then she came over to Betty's chair and repeated her question. "Didn't you hear me, Betty? I asked can't we go for our walk pretty soon?"

Betty looked at her coldly. "You can go any time you like," she said.

"But I'm your company. You asked me to spend the afternoon, and have supper with you and Miss Eleanor and Eugenia."

Betty continued her cold scrutiny of the

Smallest Sister's small person. "I asked my nice little sister to supper," she announced judicially. "I didn't ask a silly little girl who has silly little quarrels with her best friends, and then won't talk it over with me and let me help her straighten it all out."

"I don't want to straighten it out," muttered Dorothy defiantly, "and Frisky specially asked us ——"

"Not to talk about it in the school," concluded Betty. "If she asked you not to talk about it to your mothers and big sisters, why, she isn't a good kind of chum for you. She can't be."

Dorothy flushed an angry pink. "Just wait till you see her. She's lovely. She's the nicest chum I ever, ever had."

Betty got up quietly and handed the Smallest Sister her hat and coat. "You'd better be going back, I think," she said very cheerfully.

"Back where?"

"To school, of course, for supper."

"I can't do that," Dorothy interposed hastily. "Why, I asked Miss Dick for permission to come and stay with you till the even-

ing study hour. She'd think it was very queer for me not to stay."

"I'll telephone her and explain," said Betty inexorably.

"I shan't go if you do," declared the little rebel. "So now! I shan't go!"

"Dorothy Wales," began Betty gravely, putting one arm around the Smallest Sister's waist and drawing her stiff little figure closer, "if mother were here and you acted this way you know as well as I do what she'd do. She'd send you straight to bed to stay all this lovely long afternoon. Now I'm not mother, so I can't do that. It's not my place. But I can see that I've made a mistake in bringing you here. I thought you loved me enough to do as I want—as I think best, I mean. You don't, so I must send you home to mother at once. Now I want you to go right back to Miss Dick's, and tell her that I can't have you to tea to-day. You needn't say why. And I shall write to mother to-night."

"But Betty ——"

"There's no use arguing about it, Dorothy," Betty cut her short. "I mean exactly what I say. Put on your hat at once."

A month of being the youngest boarder and the school pet, supplemented by Eugenia's many flattering attentions, had badly spoiled the Smallest Sister, but she could still recognize the voice of authority. In an uncomfortable flash she came to her senses. Her sister Betty meant what she said. She was going to be sent back to mother in disgrace. For a few minutes longer pride sustained her. Silently she lifted her chin for Betty to draw the elastic of her hat beneath it. Silently she stretched out her arms for Betty to pull on her coat. With only a faint tremor in her voice she said good-bye, and holding herself very erect marched out of the room, shutting the door after herself in a fashion that could not absolutely be called banging, because then Betty might tell her to come back and do it over, but was perilously near that unladylike mode of procedure.

When she had gone Betty sank down wearily in her big chair. She was bewildered, frightened, discouraged. "I didn't manage right," she reflected sadly. "I ought to have got around her some way. I can't bear to send her home. I love to have her

here so, and then she will feel that it's a punishment—and it is too—when it's only that I have to do it, because I don't know how to manage. I've tried to do more than I can. Oh, dear, oh, dear, oh, dear!" Betty's golden head sank down on the arm of the big chair, and her slender figure shook with her tears.

It was thus that the Smallest Sister, flying up the stairs and bursting precipitately into the room she had left with such dignity, found her.

"Please go away. I'm t-tired. I'd rather be let alone," Betty sobbed, evidently mistaking the invader for somebody else.

The Smallest Sister hesitated, then her soft little arms tugged at the prostrate figure. "Please don't cry," she begged. "Please listen to me, Betty. I know I've got to go home. I haven't come to tease you to take it back—honestly I haven't. But I'm going to tell you all about Shirley and Francisca and me. I'd rather. Please don't cry any more, Betty dear."

Betty sat up, dabbing at her wet cheeks with a damp handkerchief. Dorothy offered



her a dry one, and when Betty moved to one side of the big chair and smoothed down her skirts invitingly, the Smallest Sister climbed in beside her. Two in a chair is always the way to begin to make up.

"Now I'll tell you," she began. "You see Frisky had a spread for her four roommates in their study after the lights were out. She rooms 'way down at the end of the long corridor, and they shut the door—that's against the rules—and lit a candle, and trusted to luck that nobody would see it shining underneath the door. Miss Carson—the one we call Kitty Carson, because she comes along so still—is their corridor teacher, and she doesn't often bother to go 'way down to that end, unless there's a noise. She didn't that night, but Shirley woke up and was thirsty and wanted a drink. And on the way to where the table with the pitcher of ice-water is, she got lost, because the hall is pretty dark, and she saw the light under the door and knocked, and they started her back the right way. Next morning she was telling about it at breakfast, and Kitty Carson heard her, and asked her all about how she got

back, and Shirley told every single thing—about the spread and who was there and all. And so now Frisky has to stay in bounds for two weeks, and she can't have any candy or a box from home till after Christmas. Kitty Carson wrote to say so—and that's all, Betty dear. Frisky said she was sick of the subject, and not to mention it again, but of course she never meant not to tell you. I s'pose you have a good reason to want to know. I'm sorry you had to cry."

Betty leaned over and kissed the flushed, eager little face so close beside hers. "Thank you for coming back," she said. "Now we're good friends again, aren't we?"

Dorothy nodded.

"And do you want to know what I think?"

Another nod.

"Well, I'm afraid you've all been very unkind to Shirley. Have you called her tattle-tale, and shut her out of all the fun, and maybe made her cry?"

This time the nod was very emphatic.

"We call her Tattle-tale Shirley. How did you ever guess that, Betty? And we don't associate with her at all. And she cries

into her pillow at night, because she hears us whispering secrets and we leave her out. But, Betty, she ought to have to feel bad. It's just mean to tell on another girl. Poor Frisky has to walk up and down the tennis-courts alone for her exercise hour, with Kitty Carson watching out of her window to see that she does it. But she says she wouldn't mind that. What she minds is thinking anybody could be so hateful that she'd go and tell."

"But did Shirley mean to tell, or did she just get frightened and confused and speak before she thought?"

"Well," the Smallest Sister admitted reluctantly, "I s'pose maybe she got rather frightened. Kitty Carson looks at you so hard through her big specs that you generally do. But she had ought to have thought." Dorothy was earnest if not grammatical. "Frisky says she'd sooner be expelled from school herself than get another girl into disgrace."

"Frisky, as you call her, is older. Shirley is little and timid, and I'm sure she didn't realize that she was saying anything wrong. Did she now, Dorothy? Tell me 'honest and true,' what you think. Did she dis-

like Frisky, and want to get her into trouble?"

"No-o, I s'pose not. She used to say she worshipped her just as much as I did."

"Then do you think it's quite fair to treat her as you have?"

"No-o, I guess maybe not. Frisky's old chum, that she had before me, said it wasn't, but I didn't s'pose she knew. I'll tell Frisky what you think, and I'll tell Shirley that I forgive her if she truly didn't mean it. Of course I can't be chums with her again, because now I'm chums with Frisky. But I won't call her tattle-tale any more, and I'll tell the others what you think." The Smallest Sister sighed and slipped off the chair. "I guess—I guess I'd better be going," she said very softly. "Were you—were you going to have ice-cream for supper, maybe?"

Betty stifled an impulse to take the appealing little figure in her arms and promise her ice-cream and chicken patties and hot chocolate and all the other dainties she loved best. She had been a very naughty little girl, and mother would say ——

The Smallest Sister, oddly enough, was also

thinking of mother. "I guess it doesn't matter what you're going to have," she announced hastily. "I guess mother would say I'd better go back and think it all over by myself quietly, and—and next time 'member to ask you first what you think about tattle-tales that don't mean to be and—and perhaps come some other night for supper. Oh"—her voice broke—"I honestly forgot that I'm to go home."

"But we're friends again, now," Betty told her, "and you're going to tell me things just as you always have. Aren't you? Will you, I mean, if I should think it over, and decide that it will be all right for you to stay?"

"Yes, I will. I will ask you about every least little thing I want to do," declared Dorothy earnestly. "Do you think that maybe you'll decide I may stay?"

"Yes, I think I'll decide that you may stay," laughed Betty. "So don't ever make me sorry that I've decided that way."

"I won't. I'm sure I won't. I just hate to have you cry, Betty."

"I think," Betty told her with a very sober face, "that you'd better not come for supper

for two whole weeks. That will make you remember better perhaps. And when you come you may bring your new chum, if Miss Dick is willing."

"Oh, goody for joy!" The Smallest Sister quite overlooked the penalty imposed on herself in the idea of being able to do something for her dear, misused Frisky.

She said good-bye contentedly, because she could tell Frisky the sooner by going home to tea, and she skip-hopped down-stairs and up the street much too gaily for a naughty little girl who had been deprived of a treat and sent away to think over her naughtiness in private.

Betty watched her smilingly. "I don't seem to be able not to spoil her," she reflected. "But she's just as sweet as she can be usually. And she came back of herself to tell me, and she really sent herself home, so I guess it's all right—that is, if this new chum is a nice girl. I do hope she is."

The Smallest Sister did not ask to be invited to supper before the appointed time, though two meals a week with Betty or Eugenia were her usual allowance, and she had grumbled

and even wept before, if anything had happened to keep her away.

"Poor Francisca can't even go to walk or down-town for two weeks. I guess I can give up one thing I like as long as that," she told Eugenia, when that soft-hearted little person suggested intervening with Betty for a restoration of privileges. "Francisca says it's a comfort to her to feel that somebody else has troubles."

On the appointed evening Eugenia had a house-play rehearsal from five to six, a class officers' meeting at quarter to seven, and a written lesson to cram for in Psych. 6. So Betty and the chums supped alone at a cunning little table by the Tally-ho's famous fireplace. It was lighted with the "extra-special" candle-shades and there were new menu-cards with fat, rosy-faced, red-coated coachmen cracking long whips at the top, and an adorable sketch of the Peter Pan Annex growing up the left side. Bob Enderby had designed them—under protest, because he said he was much too famous to be doing menu-cards nowadays; Madeline had colored them by hand, and the Tally-ho waitress had to keep

a sharp lookout to prevent their all being carried off for souvenirs. One was lost that very evening; yes, for the first time in the Tally-ho's history, an extra-special candle-shade was missing at the close of the dinner-hour.

Francisca and Dorothy arrived late and breathless—they had been kept to tidy their rooms, Dorothy explained, but Francisca shook her head playfully at her small friend and took all the blame.

"I'm always being kept for something," she said cheerfully. "It's a perfect miracle that I'm here at all. If I don't have to copy my French exercise one hundred times because I didn't pay attention in class, I have to learn 'Paradise Lost' because I contradicted Kit—Miss Carson, or else I don't pick up my nightie and—well, I'm just always in hot water, Miss Wales. It was lovely of you to ask me. Please call me Frisky—everybody does."

Francisca was the prettiest girl—next to Eleanor Watson—that Betty had ever seen. Her eyes were soft and deep and very, very brown—like big chocolate creams. Her hair



was dark and wavy, growing low down on her forehead in a widow's peak. She puffed it out around her face in a fashion that was too old for her, but was nevertheless very becoming. Her manner was that of an older girl too—very assured and confident, but very charming. When she smiled, which she did most of the time, two big dimples showed. She lisped a little, and this gave a funny, childlike twist to her remarks, which were not at all childlike. She adopted a curious attitude of resignation toward the cruel fate that kept her always "in hot water." She was sweetly forgiving toward those who had inflicted the two weeks' penance just ended, and she thanked Betty for her opinion, sent by Dorothy, about little Shirley Ware. She had entirely forgiven Shirley, she said, and she meant to forget about it and hoped Shirley would do the same.

"You see," she explained, "all the little girls love me so that I imagine they did make her pretty uncomfortable. I never meant them to, Miss Wales, but you can't help being a favorite and having people champion your cause. Can you now?"

She made picturesquely vague references to some secret sorrow that was even worse than being in perpetual hot water at Miss Dick's. Afterward Betty inquired about it from Dorothy.

"Oh, she's got a stepmother," Dorothy explained in awe-struck tones. "They don't get along well together. Frisky says she's very unsympathetic." Dorothy pulled out the long word with much difficulty.

But for all her vanity and absurdity Frisky Fenton was a lovable creature. She was preëminently a "jolly girl." She had comical names for all Miss Dick's teachers. She hit off the peculiarities of her schoolmates, and told absurd stories about them. She noticed everything that went on around her and kept up a vivacious fire of comment. As soon as she forgot to affect resignation and the secret sorrow, she was most appreciative of all the pleasures life had to offer and particularly of the treat Betty had given her. Everything they had to eat was "simply great," the Tallyho was "exactly perfect," Betty was "too sweet," and Dorothy "a little darling."

Betty decided that she was only silly on

top, and, though she much preferred Shirley as a best friend for Dorothy, she saw no reason to worry about Francisca's bad influence, especially as the Smallest Sister displayed much conscientiousness in the matter of coming to consult her big sister on all important matters.

She came twice that very week. Once it was to ask if she should wear her best white dress, or only her second best blue one to Shirley's birthday party. Frisky had advised the best, under all the delicate circumstances, but Dorothy wanted to be quite sure. The next time a moral question was involved. If you were asked to a spread after bedtime was it wrong to go? Betty, who detested prigs, dexterously evaded the issue.

"It's rather messy eating in the dark, and you must get awfully sleepy waiting for the teachers to go to bed. When you've all got desperately hungry for good eats let me know, and we'll have a scrumptious spread at the Tally-ho."

## CHAPTER VII

### THE DOLL WAVE

THE B. C. A. initiation was naturally a joyous occasion. To begin with, Babbie Hildreth was commanded to stand for half an hour outside the tea-shop with a huge "engaged" sign pinned across her shoulders. She smiled composedly, waited patiently for the sign to be adjusted, and then, since no particular position had been specified, mounted hastily to the top story of the Peter Pan Annex, where the yellowing leaves completely hid her from curious eyes. Eleanor was meanwhile led to the kitchen and told to make sugar-cookies after the family recipe. As she had never in her life made sugar-cookies—or any other kind—her demonstration proved entertaining enough to while away the half hour very pleasantly. Then Babbie was called down, given one of Eleanor's cookies, and told to keep on eating it until she could guess what it was meant to be. She ate it all, making many.

vain protests, and was only excused from sampling another because she threatened, in an irresistibly clever speech, to appeal to the Humane Society. Mary Brooks was next instructed to write to the person whom she thought it most concerned, warning him about Eleanor's lack of domestic accomplishments. Then Madeline read some "Rules for the Engaged Member," which were almost as funny as the "Rules for the Perfect Patron."

Babbie had just been put in the most retired corner of the B. C. A.'s stall and told to do her "Mary-had-a-Little-Lamb" stunt, when Georgia and the Dutton twins arrived upon the scene, hot from a tennis match and voicing a reckless determination to go straight through all the sundaes and cooling drinks on the new menu.

"We can sit with you, can't we?" asked Straight Dutton. "The other stalls all have people in them, and Fluffy's hair is a disgrace to be seen."

"Then take her out behind the house—or shop or barn, whatever you call it—and pin it up," Madeline told them severely. "Certainly you can't come in here. This is a B.

C. A. tea-drinking and initiation. You're not B. C. A.'s."

"That's not our fault. It's perfectly mean of you to have a secret society and leave us out," wailed Fluffy. "Think of all the orders we got you for skirt braids."

"In this hard world, my children, virtue is often its only reward," Mary reminded them sweetly. "Run away now and play."

"Let's spite them by stalking out of their old tea-shop and transferring our valuable patronage to Cuyler's," suggested Georgia.

"I'm too tired to stir," protested Fluffy. "Let's stay here and play a lovely party of our own right under their noses, and never ask them to come."

"Let's sit down quick."

"Shall we begin with sundaes or lemonade?"

"With both," announced Fluffy with decision, smiling so persuasively at Nora that she abandoned two fussy heads of departments, who wanted more hot water, milk for their tea instead of lemon, and steamed muffins instead of toasted, while she supplied Fluffy, first with hairpins from the box that

Betty kept in her desk on purpose for such emergencies, and then with three sundaes and two cold drinks.

Fluffy arranged the five glasses in an artistic crescent in front of her, and sipped and tasted happily.

"You're not true sports," she told the others, who had been content to begin with one order each. "You won't be hungry after the second thing you order—or maybe the third for Georgia-of-the-huge-appetite—and then you'll stop, whereas I ——" She waved her hand around the inviting crescent. "The fateful check is made out, and I can eat 'em or leave 'em—it's all the same to my pocketbook and the Tally-ho. I wish Betty Wales would come out and say if I'm not the Perfect Patron this trip."

"Well, she won't," declared Straight practically, "and if she should you'd better remember that it's your duty to act very haughty and independent. Come on now and think up something nice for us to do."

"Wish we knew what B. C. A. meant," Georgia reflected. "Then we could parody it."

"Well, we don't," Straight reminded her sharply, "so it's no use wishing. We've worn ourselves out before this trying to guess. The thing to do is to think of some regular picnic of a stunt that they'll just wish they'd thought of first. Then they'll respect us more, and realize what a mistake they made in having a snippy little 19—society, when they might have had us in it too."

"S-h!" ordered Fluffy impatiently. "Nobody can think of anything while you chatter along like that. Let's keep perfectly still for five minutes—just eat and think. I'm sure we shall get at it that way. Georgia, you've got a watch that goes. Tell us when time's up."

Georgia was too much occupied with keeping track of the time limit to hit upon an idea, and when Straight's sundae gave out at the end of the second minute, she could not keep her eyes and her mind from a furtive consideration of the menu. So nobody interrupted Fluffy when, at Georgia's "Time's up," she shot out a triumphant, "I've got it!"



"I'm not sure whether it's four minutes or five," said Georgia anxiously, "but if you've got it, Fluffy, fire away."

"Well, only the general plan," explained Fluffy modestly. "I think we ought to set a silly fashion. We can—girls are like sheep, and we've made a reputation for doing interesting things that all the others wish they could do too. We can call the thing the 'C. I.'s'—that's for Complete Idiots—and not tell a soul what it means until we're ready to back out and let our devoted followers feel as silly as they have to. It will be a circus pretending to be keen for it ourselves and egging the others on, and it will just show the B. C. A.'s that we're not as young and simple-minded as maybe they think us."

"That sounds good to me," agreed Georgia, "only what fashion shall we set?"

Fluffy frowned and rumpled her hair absently. "I can't think of anything silly enough. Big bows and pompadours and coronet braids and so on are as silly now as they possibly could be. Shoes without heels wouldn't be extreme enough. Prexy wouldn't let us wear a uniform, even if we

could think of a ridiculous enough one. I guess it can't be anything about dress."

"Some fad for our desks, like ploshkins," suggested Straight.

"Only not a bit copy-catted from that, because some of the B. C. A.'s helped start ploshkins," amended Georgia.

"Let's take another think," said Fluffy.

"Wait a minute," begged Straight, and providently ordered two more sundaes to span the terrible interval.

"You keep time on this thought," ordered Georgia, passing her watch to Fluffy.

Fluffy nodded abstractedly.

"Five minutes," she announced presently. "I can't think of——"

"This time I've got it," Georgia broke in eagerly. "First I thought of a silly game like tops or marbles or skipping ropes, and then I thought of dolls—buying them and dressing them and carrying them around. I heard of a girls' school that did it once in dead earnest." She looked anxiously at Fluffy, who could "get people excited over the fourth dimension if she wanted to." "What about it, Fluff?"

Fluffy sipped from each of her five glasses reflectively before she answered.

"Dolls it is," she said briefly at last. "Come on down and buy ours now."

The straight-haired twin had never played with dolls in her life, having scorned all feminine diversions and spent her youth chasing rabbits, riding her pony, or playing tag, hockey, and prisoner's base with her brothers and her brothers' friends. She chose the biggest, most elegant, and expensive French doll in the shop, named her Rosa Marie on the spot, and paid for Georgia's choice—a huge wooden doll with staring blue eyes and matted black hair—on condition that Georgia would help her dress Rosa Marie.

"You're actually getting fond of Rosa Marie already," Georgia teased her.

"Maybe I am," said Straight stoutly, "but you'd better not fuss, when I'm spending such a lot to help along your game."

"Lucky we're starting on it so early in the month," Fluffy said, a baby doll in a lace bonnet and a long white dress in one hand, and an Esquimaux, in white fur from head to foot, in the other.

"Get 'em both and come along," advised Georgia. "You'll look terribly cute going home with one on each arm."

"And if you get small ones you can be getting more all the time," Straight took her up. "Have a regular family, you know, and a carriage to take them out in, and a doll's house to keep them in at home. A doll's house would look great in your room, Fluffy dear."

"It's so bare and cheerless that it just needs a doll's house," declared Georgia. "I dare you to buy one and put it on your royal Bokara rug, between your teakwood table and your Dutch tee-stopf, with your best Whistler print hanging over it."

Fluffy turned to the saleswoman. "These two, please," she said, "and let me see your largest, loveliest doll's house."

The organizers and charter members of the C. I.'s tramped home in the autumn twilight, quarreling amiably about the relative advantages of "risking" to-morrow's Logic quiz and writing "Lit." papers between breakfast and chapel, or making a night of it—and in that case should the doll-dressing come before or after ten?

"I can't 'risk' Logic," Straight confessed sadly. "I've been warned already. Don't make me sit up all by myself to cram. I'd almost rather not dress Rosa Marie to-night than do that."

Just then they ran into Eugenia Ford coming out of the Music Building.

"Hello, Miss Ford," Georgia greeted her pleasantly. "Look at Fluffy's dolls. Have you got one yet?"

Eugenia, somewhat dazed by the suddenness of the onslaught, went into raptures over the baby doll, blushing and acknowledged that she hadn't one, and begged for more light on the matter.

"Oh, well, you're not so far behind the times," Fluffy consoled her sweetly. "The limit is day after to-morrow, isn't it, Georgia? If you get one all ready by then, you can join the C. I.'s."

"What in the world is that?" demanded Eugenia eagerly.

"I believe the meaning's to be a secret for a while," Straight explained solemnly, "but if you have a doll you can belong; that I'm sure of. We've got ours here." She patted

Rosa Marie, and pointed to Georgia's ungainly parcel. "It's sure to be fun. Anyway, we're all for it."

"It sounds just splendid," declared Eugenia, who still had aspirations toward intimacy with the jolliest, most exclusive crowd in Harding. "It's lovely of you to tell me about it. Can anybody—can I tell my friends?"

The conspirators exchanged glances. Democracy would repel Eugenia. To her the C. I.'s must be made to appear highly exclusive.

"Ye-es," Fluffy said at last. "It's for anybody—that is anybody you'd ask. The dolls have got to be dressed by day after to-morrow, you know. Straight's is going to be a perfect wonder. We're thinking of having a doll-show later, so you'd better take some pains with yours. Good-night."

"I wonder if the stores are closed yet," added Straight loudly as Eugenia started off. "I ought to have bought some real lace for Rosa Marie's petticoat."

"Let's go back, even if we are late to dinner," declaimed Georgia distinctly. "By to-

morrow everybody in the place will be rushing down for dolls and dolls' dresses, and they'll be dreadfully picked over."

The conspirators paused to watch the effect of their sallies, and subsided, overcome with mirth, on the Music Building steps, when little Eugenia walked more slowly, halted, and finally turned down the hill toward Main Street.

"She's not going to be at the tail of any procession of Complete Idiots," chuckled Georgia. "Oh, I say, here comes Christabel Porter! Let's tackle her."

Christabel Porter was a lanky, spectacled senior with a marvelous memory, a passion for scientific research, a deep hatred of persons who misnamed helpless infants, and a whole-hearted contempt for the frivolity of the Dutton twins and their tribe. She respected Georgia, making an exception of her because she always wore her hair plain and never indulged in any kind of feminine furbelows.

"No use," objected Fluffy. "Let's go along to dinner so we can get through and begin on Rosa Marie's clothes."

"We've got all night," said Georgia easily,

"if we need it. Let's have a try at the impossible. Hello, Christabel. Have you been buying one too?"

Christabel squinted near-sightedly at the trio. "Oh, it's you," she said. "What on earth are you doing up here on those cold steps, when it's past six already?"

"Talking to you," Fluffy told her sweetly, holding the Esquimaux up against the western light and smoothing the baby's skirts ostentatiously.

Christabel squinted harder. "Dolls!" she scoffed at last. "What on earth are you up to now?"

"Georgia's is the biggest," said Straight sulkily. "Tell her about the C. I.'s, Georgia. You were the one that thought of it. It's nothing to blame us about."

Christabel listened to the tale in bewildered silence. At the conclusion she gave a deep sigh. "Count me in," she said. "I'm thinking of taking a Ph. D. in psychology at Zurich next winter. I guess this is as good an experiment on the play instinct as I'm likely to run up against." She sighed again deeply. "Of all the queer unaccountable re-



actions! If it was after midyears, perhaps I could understand it, but now — Don't tell any one else that I'm studying it, please; they wouldn't be quite natural if they knew. Where do you buy dolls?"

That evening the Belden House was in a flutter of excitement. The Dutton twins were in Georgia's room with the door locked. Fluffy's dolls were reposing on her bed, carefully pillowed on two lace-edged sachets. The doll's house was delivered about eight o'clock, and most of the paper was torn off it in some way or other before Fluffy saw it. Georgia sternly refused to open the door to any one. The sound of cheerful conversation, laughter, and little squeals of pleasurable excitement floated out over the transom. Plainly the Dutton twins and Georgia Ames were not studying Logic—or they were studying it after peculiar methods of their own. Furthermore, Fluffy's note-book was lying conspicuously on her table, and Barbara West had borrowed Georgia's, and was almost in tears over its owner's curt refusal to come out and explain what Barbara angrily described as "two pages of hen scratches about undis-

tributed middle, and that was just what I didn't get!"

When the quarter to ten warning-bell jangled through the Belden House halls, Georgia threw her room hospitably open. With magic celerity it filled up with curious girls, who stared in amazement at the spectacle of Straight Dutton rocking a huge doll to sleep, laughed at Wooden's mussed wig and checked gingham apron—"Exactly like the ones I used to have to wear," Georgia explained pathetically, "and the other girls laughed at me just that way"—and noisily demanded explanations of the absurd trio's latest eccentricity. Next morning alarm clocks went off extra early, Main Street swarmed with Belden House girls on a before-chapel quest for dolls, the toy-shop proprietor telegraphed a hurry order to the nearest doll factory, and surreptitious examination of queer, hunchy bundles broke the tension of the Logic quiz and blocked the hallways between classes.

That afternoon there were doll-dressing bees at every campus house, and Fluffy's doll-tea in Jack o' Hearts' stall was the centre of interest at the Tally-ho Tea-Shop.

A pleasant vagueness about the C. I.'s continued to pervade the speech of its founders. Nobody seemed to know exactly where or when the first meeting would be held. But, quite irrespective of the club or the mystic time-limit imposed for membership, the doll fad took possession of Harding. It was a red letter day for the conspirators when the junior class president, an influential young person who prided herself on her independence of character, appeared on the platform at class meeting, with her doll in her arms. The college poetess, who went walking alone and had had several of her verses printed in a real magazine—sure signs of genius—took her darling doll to call on the head of the English Department, with whom she was very intimate. A maid who went to the door with hot water for the tea declared “cross her heart” that she saw Miss Raymond with the doll on her lap, undressing it, “just like any kid.” However that might have been, the poetess continued to be great friends with Miss Raymond; evidently the doll episode had not “queered” her with that august lady.

So the doll wave swept the college. Spreads became doll parties, French lingerie was recklessly cut up into doll dresses, girls who had never sewed a stitch in their lives labored over elaborate doll costumes, and on warm October afternoons the campus resembled a mammoth doll market, with Paradise as an annex for exclusive little parties. Tennis matches and basket-ball games were watched by doll-laden spectators, and some of the best athletes actually refused to go into their autumnal class meets because it took too much time when the doll parties were so much more fun.

Christabel Porter showed Georgia, in strict confidence, the tabulated results of her observations.

"Insane, one," it read ; "still infantile, all freshmen, nearly all sophomores, many juniors and seniors ; slavish copy-cats, practically all the rest of the college ; can't be accounted for, three."

"The one," she explained, "is the college poetess, and the three are you and the Duttons. You're not infants, you're not stupid, you're not exactly crazy, you're far from

being copy-cats. I don't understand you at all."

"You never will, Christabel," Georgia told her sweetly, "no matter if you take a dozen Ph. D.'s in Psych. at Zurich. But you shall presently understand the C. I.'s. There is a meeting in my room to-morrow at two."

"Won't it be rather crowded?" inquired Christabel anxiously, glancing around Georgia's particularly minute and very much littered "single."

Georgia smiled enigmatically. "Oh, it won't take long, I think. It means so much red tape to arrange for a more official place, like the gym or the Student's Building hall. The back campus would do, only the weather man says rain for to-morrow."

Next morning Georgia and the Duttons cut Logic (except Straight, who dared not), Lit., and Zoölogy lab.

By noon Georgia's walls were ablaze with effective decorations. "Complete Idiots," printed in every color of the rainbow, was interspersed with sketches of every conceivable type of girl playing with every possible

variety of doll. Straight could draw, if she could not adorn a Logic class. Fluffy and Georgia sighed to think that other people's "memorabils" would be enriched with these fascinating trophies.

At a few minutes before one Straight and Fluffy slipped unostentatiously down-town in the rain to have lunch at a small new place where there would be no gamut of inquiry to run about the afternoon's plans. Georgia meanwhile locked her door and waited until the house was at lunch, when she let herself out, posted a sign, reading, "Please don't disturb until two o'clock," hurried down-town by a back way, and joined the Duttons just in time to gobble a sandwich or two before the next train to the Junction.

On the station platform they met Madeline and Babbie Hildreth.

"Where are you going?" demanded Madeline.

"To the big city to buy Georgia a turban swirl," Fluffy told them with a smile.

"I thought your C. I. blow-out was to-day," said Madeline innocently.

"Oh-ho!" cried Georgia. "So you do take

some interest in our society, though you haven't appeared to. You'll take more by to-morrow. Why don't you go to the meeting? You've just got time. I know they'd vote to set aside the entrance requirements in favor of such distinguished persons as yourselves."

"But why ——" began Babbie.

"Georgia can't live another minute without a turban swirl," jeered Straight, climbing on to the train before it had fairly stopped.

"Tell all inquiring friends that we deeply regret not being able to be present at the fatal moment," added Georgia.

"Be a dear, Madeline, and go, so you can tell us how they took it," begged Fluffy.

"There are perfectly lovely souvenirs," chanted the trio in chorus, as their train pulled out.

The organizers of the C. I.'s witnessed part of the matinée. Georgia and Straight bought a blue chiffon waist in partnership, and Fluffy, from force of habit, bought a Chinese doll. They had an early dinner to conform as far as possible to the rules about being chaperoned in town after dark, and they ar-

rived in Harding again, tired and damp but expectant, soon after seven.

At the Tally-ho they stopped to find out, if possible, what sort of reception they were likely to get further on. Madeline welcomed them joyously.

"I went," she said, "and I knew you'd want me to take charge in your absence, so I did. Everybody who got a souvenir"—she pointed to hers, decorating the wall back of the famous desk—"is happy. Others are amused or wrathful according to the stage of development of their sense of humor. Christabel Porter sent word that she understands you less than ever. The poetess almost wept at such desecration of her idyllic amusement. About two hundred girls came, and the rest of the college either tried to and couldn't get inside the Belden House door, or wept at home because of their ineligibility. Mary Brooks wept too, because her famous rumor stunt isn't in it any longer with this gallery play of yours. She wants you three to come to dinner to-morrow—Professor Hinsdale is away—and tell her all about it."

"Thanks," said the trio nonchalantly.



"Don't you think we're pretty nearly smart enough to belong to the B. C. A.'s?" demanded Georgia tartly at last.

"The B. C. A.'s?" repeated Madeline. "Oh, was that what you were venting your beautiful sarcasm on? We thought you were hitting all those new department societies that everybody is making such a silly fuss about getting into."

The trio exchanged glances.

"It was partly that," admitted Georgia. "We've absolutely sworn off from being in such things ourselves, or sending violets, except to girls who make Dramatic Club or Clio—the real big honors, you know."

"And have you also sworn off from going to the celebration dinners?" inquired Madeline with a wicked smile.

"We haven't decided about that," Georgia informed her with dignity. "But please don't forget," she added solemnly, "that your crowd began this foolish club idea, and has done a lot to develop it. It was you principally that we meant to hit off."

Madeline grinned. "I really wish you were eligible to the B. C. A.'s," she said, "because

then we could see how manfully you would resist temptation. But it will be at least a year before you can any of you possibly meet—well, we'll call it the age limit. So don't waste time hunting over the bulletin-boards for a notice of your election."

"We are generally considered rather frivolous," Georgia told her severely, "but we do stick to our principles—of which the anti-club idea is one that we cherish greatly."

"Though you've very recently acquired it," murmured Madeline.

"Very," agreed Georgia cheerfully. "Good-night."

Outside the bewildered Dutton twins sorrowfully took Georgia to task for spoiling forever their chances with the B. C. A.'s.

"Are you crazy?" demanded Straight.

"Don't you remember why we started the whole doll business?" asked Fluffy.

Georgia, who had been rather absent and constrained during the afternoon's adventures, gazed at them pityingly. "You little innocents!" she said at last. "Can't you see what she's done for us? Imagine the mud that two hundred girls have tracked through

the Belden House halls. Imagine the rage of the matron, and the things that some of the faculty prigs will say about this whole business. I've been worried to death all day, to tell you the truth. But now we don't have to care. We're reformers. We're disciples of the simple life, giving demonstrations of the foolishness of over-organization. We're sorry about the mud and all that, of course. We're—anyhow, I demand the satisfaction of telling Christabel Porter the truth about us. I can't bear to have her explain us wrong, after all her trouble." Georgia splashed into a puddle and exclaimed angrily at the incident. "What in Christendom can B. C. A. stand for?" she muttered wrathfully, stamping off the mud.

"Who cares?" cried Straight, splashing into a puddle herself for sheer bravado.

"Who indeed?" Fluffy took her up. "I've had a thought, Georgia. Let's keep on playing dolls. Then Christabel Porter can't explain us at all. She'll be too mixed up to ever go to Zurich."

## CHAPTER VIII

### MORE ARCHITECT'S PLANS, AND A MYSTERY

ONE lovely afternoon in late October, Jim Watson, arrayed in very correct riding clothes, poked his head gingerly into Betty's office, and having thus made quite sure that she was alone, stepped briskly inside and stood smiling quizzically down at her over the top of her big desk.

"What's the joke to-day?" Betty inquired, smiling frankly back at him.

"Same old joke," said Jim, leaning his elbow comfortably on a pile of pamphlets. "Small person with a generally frivolous appearance, sitting at the biggest roller-top desk on the market, flanked on the right by a filing cabinet and on the left by a typewriter. Vast correspondence strewn over desk. Brow of small person puckered in deep thought. Dimple of small ——"

"That's quite enough," interrupted Betty

severely. "I am not a joke, except to really frivolous persons like you, and I refuse to have my time wasted listening to such nonsense. Where's Eleanor?"

Jim sighed deeply. "Where is Eleanor, indeed? Paying calls, known as 'friendly visits,' on the families of her Terrible Ten—her young Italians. I thought she came up here to comfort and amuse my leisure hours, but that's certainly not what she's staying on for. Is this your day for office hours?"

"No-o," Betty admitted doubtfully, "but I thought I'd stay and ——"

"Please think again," Jim coaxed in his most beguiling fashion. "It's a gorgeous afternoon. Please come for a ride."

"But ——"

"I've engaged Hartman's best horses—the big bay for me and the little black Queen, that you Harding girls are so crazy about, for you."

"I thought Virginia Day had Queen every afternoon."

"Not when I want her. I'm a privileged person at Hartman's, because I rode every day last summer."

"Well, but you see ——"

"If you come I'll tell you a grand secret."

"About Morton Hall?" demanded Betty eagerly.

"No fair guessing. Will you come?"

Betty looked at him hard, and then out the window at the campus, sparkling in the autumn sunshine. "Oh, Jim, yes! I can't resist such a very nice party. How soon can we start?"

"How soon can you be ready?"

In a flash Betty had snapped down the lid of the absurdly big desk, closed the filing cabinet, adjusted the typewriter top, and picked up a book and her keys. "In ten minutes," she said, bundling Jim out ahead of her and locking the door. "If you should have to wait, you can be finding me a switch for a riding-crop. Mine's broken. See you in ten minutes." And she was off down the hill to change her dress.

Jim watched her lithe little figure out of sight, and then strode off to get the horses, whistling loudly. It was a triumph, even with the assistance of Queen and the promise of a secret, to have lured Betty Wales from

her official duties for a whole long, sunshiny afternoon.

They galloped out of town at a pace to scandalize the sedate dwellers on Elm Street. Where the road passed the Golf Club, under the flickering shade of tall oaks, Betty drew up to a walk and leaned forward to pat Queen's glossy neck.

"That was perfectly splendid, Jim," she declared. "Doesn't it make you wish you were a bird?"

"Makes me think I'm a bird when I go cross-country out in Colorado, over a meadow of soft, springy turf, and then splash through a brook, and out into the first real shade I've seen for a week, maybe. Makes me wish I was a cow-puncher when I think of it now."

"Then you couldn't be the distinguished architect of Morton Hall," Betty reminded him gaily. "Tell me the grand secret, Jim."

Jim looked disappointed. He had hoped she would forget about the secret. "Oh, it's not so much," he said. "Only if your august Highness wishes to eat her Thanksgiving din-

ner in Morton Hall, Morton Hall will be ready for her."

"Jim! How splendid! Are you perfectly sure?"

Jim nodded grimly. "I've slaved and I've made the men slave, and we didn't do it for the peppery Mr. Morton, either. We did it for you, because you seemed to think a few days would make such a big difference. Well, they do—in a way, of course."

"How do you mean?" asked Betty innocently.

"I mean," declared Jim earnestly, "that I'm a self-sacrificing person, if ever there was one. I've deliberately cut myself out of days and weeks of good times here in Harding——"

"Oh, Jim!" Betty flashed him a merry smile. "Please don't be silly. You know you're fond of your work and anxious to go where it takes you, and just puffed up with pride to think that you've beaten the time limit your firm had set. Why, Jim, Thanksgiving is only four weeks off!"

"I know it," gloomily.

"And the list of Morton Hall girls isn't



half made out. The matron will manage the moving-in, I suppose—arranging furniture and engaging maids, and all. When can the moving-in begin, Jim?"

"Saturday before Thanksgiving," still gloomily.

"We must have a grand housewarming," Betty declared. "The B. C. A.'s have decided on that already, but of course Madeline couldn't have an inspiration till she knew the date, so she could think of something appropriate. A Thanksgiving housewarming will certainly be appropriate for that house. You'll stay for it, won't you, Jim?"

"Thanks," darkly.

Betty considered, frowning absently. "If it's a costume party,—and most of Madeline's nicest ideas are—why, of course, you probably can't come. That will be a perfect shame, after the way you've worked. We'll have to have another special housewarming for you and Mr. Morton."

"Thanks awfully."

Jim's horse seemed to be giving him a great deal of trouble. It had edged to the extreme other side of the road and was curveting and

plunging nervously. Betty turned Queen to the other side after him.

"What's the matter with Ginger?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing," Jim assured her coldly. "He's just wondering whether this is a real ride or only a political procession."

Betty laughed and started Queen into a canter. "Why didn't you say you were tired of walking, silly?" she demanded. Then suddenly she had an idea. "Of course you know I shall miss you, Jim," she said. "We're too good friends to bother with saying things like that, when we both know them."

"Just as you say about that," said Jim with a sudden return of his smile. "But candidly now, Betty, aren't you too busy to miss people much?"

"When I'm too busy to have friends," Betty told him earnestly, "I shall just stop being busy. Life wouldn't be worth living without friends."

"But you've got such a lot, haven't you?" Jim asked, idly flicking at the scarlet sumach leaves with his crop. They were walking again now.

"Any college girl has a lot, and any college man. Haven't you?"

Jim nodded. "I was just thinking that one, more or less ——"

"Jim!" Betty's tone was highly indignant. "You're fishing! But you act so blue to-day, and you've worked so hard for Morton Hall, that I'll just ask you a question. Which one of your good friends, 'more or less,' doesn't matter?"

Jim laughed. "You're right, of course. I do get blue—it runs in the family, I guess. Eleanor's that way, too."

"She's not half as silly as you are," laughed Betty. "But seriously, Jim, I don't know what I shall do when you go. You're such a splendid safety-valve. And then these glorious rides ——"

"We've had only two ——"

"There you go again," sighed Betty. "Do you expect a busy person like me to take whole afternoons off every single week? Oh, dear! Aren't those bittersweet berries on the vines growing over those little trees?"

"I don't know anything about the habits

or appearance of bittersweet berries, but I'll bring you some."

He was back in a few minutes with a bunch of the pretty red berries. Betty looked at them closely. "Oh, it is bittersweet!" she cried. "Madeline and Emily want some most dreadfully for the copper jar at the Tally-ho. Could we carry a few sprays back, do you think?"

"Carry a bushel, if you like," Jim declared. "But first—there's a trail up there that starts off through the woods. What do you say to trying it?"

They rode as far as they could under the red and yellow boughs, and when the trail stopped Jim discovered a grove of walnut trees, and Betty declared that proved they were almost up Walnut Mountain. So they tied the horses and climbed the rest of the way, up a steep, pebbly path, hearing a partridge whirr on the way and scattering a whole family of lively little chipmunks who ran ahead of them, scolding angrily at so unwarrantable an intrusion of their private playground. They arrived panting at the top at last, and stayed so long looking at the

view that they felt obliged to run all the way down to the horses. Then Jim showed Betty how to pack a "bushel" of bittersweet behind her saddle for the Tally-ho, and tied another bunch on his for Morton Hall. They cantered all the way home in the crisp, frosty dusk, and Jim, in answer to Betty's mocking inquiry about his blues, declared it had been such a ripping afternoon that he believed they were lost forever in the Bay of the Ploshkin.

Betty dined at the Tally-ho, with Madeline, Straight Dutton, and Georgia.

"We've found a perfect Morton Hall-ite for you," Georgia informed her eagerly. "Just exactly the kind you want, and she hadn't applied and wasn't going to."

"Who is she?" demanded Betty. "And will she come?"

"Binks Ames didn't ask her because she was afraid she'd muddle it," Georgia explained lucidly, putting the cart before the horse. "Binks discovered her, and told us to tell you. She's in the infirmary—Binks, I mean, and the other girl, too. Got the mumps, Binks has, and the other one had

rheumatism or something. Binks is my freshman cousin—the peculiar one from Boston. Her real name is Elizabeth B. Browning Ames—after the poetess. Her mother goes in for Browning classes and things, but Binks is the soul of prose.”

“Tell her about the Morton Hall-ite,” advised Straight. “Binks hasn’t anything to do much with it.”

“That’s so,” agreed Georgia placidly, “but she’s rather an interesting person, and Betty ought to meet her. She’s the kind that’s always discovering things—just the way she discovered this girl.”

“Georgia,” declared Madeline amiably, “I always knew you had a weakness, of course—all mortal creatures have. Now I’ve discovered that it’s a weakness for family history. In order to start you on the right track let me ask you a leading question. What are the Morton Hall-ite’s name, class, and qualifications for admission?”

“Name unknown, class unknown, qualifications extreme general forlornness, and a boarding place at the end of nowhere.”

“Where is that?” asked Betty smilingly.

"Oh, Binks didn't dare ask," explained Georgia. "You see Binks knows she's an awful blunderer at being nice to people."

"Then how ——" began Betty.

"Oh, that's all arranged," explained Georgia easily. "You can come with me tomorrow when I go to see Binks, and if we explain a little to the matron she'll let you in to see the other one. Everybody is sorry for her, because she seems so blue and forlorn, and never gets calls or flowers or letters."

"She sounds rather formidable, some way," Betty demurred. "I think it would be better for one of the faculty members of the board to go and see her and ask her."

"But I promised Binks I'd bring you. You can at least cheer up the other one, and if you funk on asking her then you can send a faculty later."

"That reminds me that there isn't going to be any too much 'later.'" Betty told them the great news, ending with, "So please plan a scrumptious housewarming right away, Madeline."

And Madeline promised, grumbling, how-

ever, about the constant interruptions to which her aspiring genius was subject.

"You want a housewarming," she wailed. "Eleanor wants a masque for the Terrible Ten. Mary wants an *alumnae* stunt for Dramatic Club's June meeting. Dick Blake wants a pantomime for the Vagabonds' ladies' night. So it goes! And the worst of it is that the editors sternly refuse to want anything of me—except the Sunday Supplement people, and they want nothing but Vapor for the Vacant-Minded. I'm losing my mind—what little I have—trying to make the articles sound silly enough."

Betty went next day with Georgia to see Binks Ames, who proved to be a thin, brown little freshman, with wonderful gray eyes and a friendly, impulsive manner.

"It's queer about me," she told them. "I seem to attract freaks. All my friends at school were queer unfortunates that my brothers fussed at having to take around when they came to visit me. And now the first thing I've done at Harding is to have mumps at the same time with Miss Ellison, who writes poems ——"



"Technically known as the C. P., or College Poet," Georgia interrupted.

"And a queer scientific person with a bulging forehead and a squint, named Jones. We weren't any of us very sick, and we sat and talked by the hour, and hit it off beautifully. And now they've gone"—she lowered her voice—"there's the Mystery. We named her that because she spooked around and never came near us, except by mistake. But the last two days, since we've been here alone, we've become quite dangerously chummy, and she's told me things to make your heart ache."

The sympathetic thrill in Binks' voice explained sufficiently why unfortunates always sought her out, and her next remark gave further testimony to her real genius for friendship. "I never let them see that I understand. It would scare them off. I act as if they were like everybody else. Seeing that people know you're a freak or an unfortunate only makes you more of a one, don't you think? But Georgia has told me that you are the kind that can straighten things out—not just let the poor things stick to you

like burrs and try to make up to them, the silly way I do. Now, Georgia, you'd better wait here. I'll take Miss Wales in to her myself, and then you'll be an excuse for me to get away and leave her there."

The Mystery was crouching by a west window, looking out at Paradise, with the low sun tangled in the yellow elms on the hill beyond. She was tall and slight and stooped, with a muddy complexion and a dull, expressionless face. She flushed uncomfortably when she saw them, and received Binks' stammered explanation about wanting to share her callers with stolid indifference. Left alone with her, Betty remembered Anne Carter, the girl with the scar, and wished she had made Binks tell her what in this girl's life had left her so frightened and hopeless and so bitterly reticent. She was a junior. She lived on Porter Hill—about a mile from the campus. She didn't mind the walk; you could count it in your exercise hours. She was not particularly interested in any study; she just took what seemed best. If you meant to teach it wasn't wise to specialize too much; you might have to take a position for Latin

or Algebra when you had applied for History. She would prefer to teach English herself. Betty had brought Binks a new "Argus" to read. She asked the Mystery—her name was Esther Bond—if she had seen Helena Mason's new story.

"It's awfully clever," she said. "All her stories sound so knowing, some way, as if she had seen and done lots of unusual story-book sort of things. They have what Miss Raymond calls atmosphere and the note of reality."

"Yes," said Miss Bond.

"She's in your class, isn't she?" Betty rattled on. "Do you know her?"

"Yes, I know her."

"Is she really as unusual and fascinating as her stories seem?" Betty pursued.

"I consider her one of the most commonplace girls in Harding," said Miss Bond stolidly.

"Well, at least you've at last said something besides yes and no," Betty reflected, and turned the talk to Binks, the infirmary régime, and finally to campus life.

When at last, having decided that nothing was to be gained by delay, she made her sug-

gestion about Miss Bond's coming into Morton Hall, the Mystery laughed a queer, rasping laugh.

"I knew that's what you were getting at," she said. "You're the new secretary. I'm not so out of things that I don't know that."

"And you'll come?" Betty asked cordially.

"I think not. I'd rather be out of the campus fun altogether than in it on charity."

Betty explained as tactfully as possible the difference between what she called Mr. Morton's kindness and what was sometimes meant by charity, and suggested a few of the advantages to be gained from living on the campus for a while.

The Mystery listened apathetically.

"Well, it doesn't matter much what I do. Perhaps I may as well come. Only is there a room that I can have off by itself somewhere? I couldn't stand being tumbled in with a stranger, or having my door open right against hers."

"Then," said Betty eagerly, "you shall have the tower room. It's so much by itself that I told Mr. Watson—he's the architect in charge—that I was afraid no girl would dare

to sleep alone there. It's like an island surrounded by linen closets, and then being in a tower it juts out quite away from everything else. And it's the very prettiest room in the house," she added enthusiastically.

Miss Bond didn't know that she cared much how it looked.

"I'll let you know in a day or two how I decide," she said. "I should have to see—there are some things to consider. Do you know if the junior novel course has a written lesson to-morrow?"

Betty didn't know, and neither did Georgia, whom she applied to for the information; but she promised to find out and let the Mystery know by telephone. Miss Bond thanked her with the first touch of real feeling she had shown that afternoon.

## CHAPTER IX

### MOVING IN

BETTY WALES, her sleeves rolled up to her elbows and her trim little figure enveloped in one of her famous kitchen aprons, stood on a chair in the china closet of Morton Hall, covering the top shelves neatly with sheets of white paper. One of the three richest men in New York, very damp and red in the face from his exertions, was screwing in hooks for pots and pans in the pantry next door. A rising young architect was helping the pretty wife of a distinguished psychology professor wash dishes, ready to put on Betty's carefully spread papers. A would-be literary light was hanging pictures on the softly-tinted walls of the house parlor. Up-stairs Georgia, Babbie, and Eugenia Ford were superintending the efforts of the night-watchman and a janitor to arrange a bed, a bureau, a wash-stand, a desk, and two chairs to the best advantage in rooms guaranteed by the rising young architect

aforesaid to be perfectly capable of holding those articles,—or, in the case of double rooms, twice the number.

Betty Wales wasn't very tall, and the shelves were high and very, very long. Her arms ached from stretching; her back was tired from spreading innumerable rugs; her brain reeled with dozens of petty but important details. But she worked on doggedly, pushing back her curls wearily when they got in her eyes, ordering, coaxing, or bullying her distinguished assistants, her mind intent on one thing: Morton Hall must be ready for the girls when they came to-morrow.

It was all because the matron had sprained her wrist—this hurry and scurry and confusion at the last minute. She had hoped every day to be able to come on and take charge of the settling, and from day to day they had waited, until finally Prexy, realizing that they had waited much too long, had asked Betty to take charge in her place. The matron was coming that afternoon at five, with her arm still in a sling. Betty had promised to meet her. Jim Watson was keeping track of the time, and Mr. Morton's car would be

ready to take her to the station. At distractingly frequent intervals the door-bell rang, and Mary Brooks Hinsdale had to stop wiping dishes to answer it. In the end Betty always had to go, but Mary saved her time and anxiety about appearances by finding out who each visitor was.

"Never mind the smut on your left cheek," she would say. "It's only another person come to apply for a job as waitress, and she's much too untidy herself to notice a small smut."

Or, "This time you must take off your apron, Betty. It's Prexy—he says he'll only keep you a minute, but it's important."

Or, "A strange looking freak of a girl, Betty. If she hadn't acted so completely scared, I'd have said you couldn't be bothered. She looked as if she might jump into the next county if I suggested taking you her message."

And each time Betty smilingly hopped off her chair, greeted her visitor as cordially as if she was not feeling—to quote Mary Brooks—exactly like a cross between a reckless rith-erum and a distracted centipede, and got back





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to her shelves as soon as she could possibly manage it, stopping on the way to encourage Mr. Morton, hurry Madeline, and warn Jim to wipe the dishes dry.

"Everything must be spick and span," she insisted, "to start us off right."

At last Jim called "Four-forty-five, Betty," and she jumped down again and ran to her room—the only place in the house that hadn't been settled a bit—to dress. But she was so tired that she ended by unceremoniously borrowing Eleanor's fur coat to put on over her mussy linen dress, and ordered Jonas to take her for a restful little spin up Elm Street. And so she managed to be all smiles and sparkles and pretty speeches of welcome for the matron, who was a nice motherly lady with the loveliest snow-white hair, and a sense of humor that twinkled out of her blue eyes and discovered everything comical about Betty—even to the mussy linen under the borrowed elegance—before Jonas had seen to the baggage and rushed his passengers up to Morton Hall.

As Betty opened the door shrieks of mirth floated out to them from the matron's rooms.

"Excuse me one minute, Mrs. Post," she said hastily, "while I see if everything is ready for you."

The whole company of "Settlers," as Madeline called them, not excepting the under-janitor and the night-watchman, were gathered in Mrs. Post's cozy sitting-room.

"Where is she?" demanded Jim eagerly, when Betty appeared.

"Didn't she come after all?" asked Georgia disappointedly.

"We've got ready the loveliest chorus of welcome," explained Madeline, with a complacent wave of the hand at her fellow workers. "A Settlers' Chorus, with solos by some of the most distinguished Settlers. Now, Betty, don't look so horrified. Any sensible matron will be tremendously flattered by such a unique attention."

"It's perfectly respectable, Betty," Mary Brooks Hinsdale assured her, "and Mr. Morton and Mr. Watson and the night-watchman will never have another chance to be in a Harding show."

"What's that?" demanded Mr. Morton, who had been so engrossed in studying his

part that he had not noticed Betty's arrival. "I've heard a great deal about Harding shows, but I certainly never expected to be in a troupe. Bring on your audience, Miss B. A., or I shall forget my lines."

There was no use arguing. "All right," agreed Betty, "only please remember that she's a stranger to Harding ways, and don't do anything to shock her too much. While the entertainment is going on, I'll make us all some tea."

But nobody would listen to that proposition for a minute. Betty, being herself chief Settler, must hear the Settlers' Chorus. It ended by Mr. Morton's summoning Jonas to make the tea—each Settler having unselfishly insisted upon being the one to do it. But Jonas was so entranced by the sight of his master singing a doggerel stanza in praise of the Admirable Architect, to a tune that he fondly supposed to be "A Hot Time," that he let the water boil over to begin with, and then steeped the tea until it was bitter and had to be thrown away.

After Mr. Morton's performance had been duly applauded, the night-watchman sang to

the Beneficent Benefactor, and Madeline sang to the Courageous Captain, meaning Mrs. Post herself. The Daring Defender was of course the night-watchman, glorified by Babbie as worthy of a gift of "salad and ice and all things nice"—in memory of the supper the three B's had spilled on his head when they were freshmen. Madeline was the Esthetic Elevator because she hung pictures and planned entertainments in a way to elevate the taste of the inmates, and Betty was the Flossy Furbelow, who sat and watched other people work. The alphabet ended with F, the chorus explained,

"For Settlers must work  
While others may rhyme.  
We'd have gone farther  
If there had been time."

But they had gone far enough to put Mrs. Post at her ease with everybody. While fresh tea was being made by the contrite Jonas, the Settlers escorted her triumphantly over her domain, and she praised everything and thanked everybody and seemed to fit so beautifully into the niche she had come to fill that Betty fairly danced with relief and ex-

citement. If only the girls caught the right spirit as easily!

But of course some of them didn't. There was the Thorn, who roomed on the ground floor next to Betty, and who ran in twenty times during the first week to make an absurd complaint or ask an impossible favor. There was the Mystery up in her tower; she locked herself in so ostentatiously that she offended her next door neighbor, who promptly announced her intention of leaving such a "cliquey" house. There was the Goop, whose table manners were only equaled by the fine disorder of her apartment. She had been assigned to a double room, but she had to be tactfully transferred to a single, on the tearful complaint of her roommate; and more tactfully urged to pick up her possessions, and not to eat with her knife. Then there were the Twin Digs, to whom the ten o'clock rule was as if it had never been, and the Romantic Miss, who professed bland and giggling innocence in regard to campus rules about gentlemen callers. Jim named them all, except the Mystery, in the last confidential chat that he and Betty had together, and he made her

promise solemnly to keep him informed of their escapades.

"For I feel like a sort of Dutch uncle to all the Morton Hall-ites," he explained. "May I run up once in a while to see how you are getting on?"

"May you? Will you?" was Betty's enthusiastic response.

"There might be some little changes," went on Jim boldly. "The only real test of a house is to live in it a while. If there is anything that doesn't suit, you'll let me know?"

Betty promised to do that also, and Jim departed, divided between encouragement at Betty's cordial invitation and her promise to write, and a conviction that before he had shut the door she had forgotten his very existence in rapt absorption in her official plans and perplexities.

The housewarming was a "Madelineish" success—that was foreordained—in spite of the Mystery's refusal to attend it, the Thorn's loud declaration that it was an absurd idea, and the Goop's first using part of her costume for a dusting cloth and then losing it all in the unfathomable depths under her bed. Of



course it was absurd—deliciously absurd—the Thanksgiving of the Purple Indians. The Purple Indians lived in blue tents in the depths of a pink forest. Their clothes were travesties of the latest shades and modes. They were thankful for the beautiful color-scheme of their world, for the seclusion and leisure of their lives. Presently they were discovered by a band of New Women, who converted them to suffrage, dress-reform, and the pursuit of culture, and marched them off to a Female College where they could live to learn—not to eat and to dress. There were sly local hits at the doll fad, the faculty's latest diversions, the department societies, the frivolities of Harding life in general.

With a few exceptions the Morton Hall girls entered into the affair with spirit, making friends over the rehearsals and committee meetings, displaying much executive ability, and encouraging Betty to feel that in spite of some small disappointments in the character of a few of those who had been chosen, most of the Morton Hall-ites were fine girls, well worthy the help they were receiving in such generous measure.

The Mystery fully justified her title. She was a bundle of contradictions. In spite of her curious craving for isolation, she seemed hungry for friendship and sympathy. She was painfully anxious for a part in the play and surprised Madeline by suggesting a clever little scene to be added to it; but all of a sudden she declared the scene would be too silly, refused to write it out, and was with difficulty persuaded to keep her part in the performance.

She seemed to have made no friends in her three years of college life, and she assured Betty forlornly that there was no one she cared to ask to the play. But when Betty told Binks Ames, and Binks humbly begged for an invitation, the Mystery acted frightened and embarrassed, and disappeared the minute the play was over, leaving Binks to spend the rest of the evening as best she might.

"I think she's your kind," Betty told Mrs. Post. "I'll poke up the Goop and console the Thorn, if you'll try to clear up the Mystery—and cheer her up too."

So Esther Bond found herself repeatedly

invited into Mrs. Post's cheerful little sitting-room for tea and a good talk in the dusk of the afternoon. Often just before ten Mrs. Post would tap on the tower-room door, and step in for a cheerful inquiry about "lessons" and a friendly good-night. At first the Mystery resented these intrusions as spying on her jealously guarded seclusion. She accepted Mrs. Post's invitations sulkily because she could not well refuse, and sat, glum and silent, in the chair farthest from her hostess, as though intent on preventing all intruders from scaling her wall of reserve.

But gradually she melted. Mrs. Post was so friendly, so impervious to sulks and melancholy. It was so evident that her interest had nothing to do with curiosity—that she knew and cared nothing about the Mystery's place in the college world. Best of all, she never referred to the Mystery's habit of locking her door; she might never have noticed it from her unconscious manner.

One night the Mystery sat down quite close to Mrs. Post, and the feeling of intimacy that comes from sitting close together in the fire-light unsealed her lips. She told Mrs. Post

about her lonely childhood spent on her grandfather's farm.

"He was awfully poor," she explained. "The farm was mortgaged, and everything was old and forlorn and coming to pieces. Once the Humane Society officers arrested him for driving a lame horse to town. I was with him. I remember how ashamed I was. I begged him to let me go back and live with my mother. Then at last he told me that mother was dead, and that my father had treated her cruelly and had refused to take care of her 'brats.' I shall never forget the sting of that word. It drowned out the shame of being arrested for cruelty to animals. Well, the next year the mortgage was foreclosed and the farm sold. The shame of that killed my grandfather. My grandmother went to the poorhouse, and I went to work for a family in the village, where I could earn my board and have a chance to go to school. I used to think I'd like to teach."

"Well, you can in a year more," Mrs. Post told her cheerfully. "It's a noble calling."

"I shall hate it all the same," declared the Mystery fiercely.

"Oh, no, you won't, child," Mrs. Post told her, patting her shoulder gently. "You mustn't quarrel with your bread and butter. Who sends you to Harding?"

"A woman I worked for once at home pays part of my expenses. I shall return it all as soon as I can. That's all I shall have to work for now," she added bitterly, "except bread and butter. My grandmother died when I was a freshman."

"Just let me read you the last letter I had from my daughter, who is a nurse," Mrs. Post would say at this stage of the Mystery's confidences. "Or no," after a minute's vain search for her reading glasses, "you read it to me, dear."

The daughter who was a nurse was a cheerful, placid creature, with a simple, optimistic belief in the joy of life and the nobility of her profession. The Mystery enjoyed the letters in spite of herself, and was divided between contempt and envy of the writer.

One night the Mystery crept shamefacedly down from her lonely tower just to kiss Mrs. Post good-night. She found that good lady in a state of joyous excitement over the

engagement of the daughter who was a stenographer.

"She is the oldest of the family," she explained. "She's helped me, and helped keep the other girls in school, and given Bella nearly all the money she needed for her nurse's course. She's worked hard, and she has never complained. Now I hope she can have a nice easy time."

"So do I," said the Mystery heartily. "And, Mrs. Post, I'm going to try not to complain and not to hate so many people and things. Maybe I can find a bright side to life if I try. I guess you think I'm a grumbler, but I've had a lot to make me one."

"I know you have, dear," Mrs. Post told her soothingly.

But the Mystery shook her head. "No, you don't know, dear lady. Nobody knows. I've never told you the real big trouble—I couldn't. Good-night."

To Betty the Mystery continued cold and forbidding, and Betty wisely decided to leave her to Mrs. Post.

"There are people I don't especially like," she reflected, "and of course there are people

who don't like me. The Mystery is evidently one of them. I must write Jim and tell him what a hit his tower room makes with her, even if I can't get near her."

## CHAPTER X

### GHOSTS AND INSPIRATIONS

ONE snowy afternoon in December Dorothy, looking like a snowbird in her gray coat powdered with big white flakes, flitted into Betty's room and without giving her sister a chance to say "How do you do?" burst out with her great news.

"There's such an excitement at school. Miss Dick just laughs, but Kitty Carson thinks it was burglars, and we girls all think it was a ghost."

"Goodness, what a beautiful excitement!" laughed Betty. "Tell me all about it."

"Well, you see Shirley Ware heard it first," explained Dorothy, "and she was so scared that she tried to scream. And all that came out was a kind of a choke. It woke me up and then I heard it too—the other noise, I mean. It was a queer little scratching and knocking on the wall."

"Mice, you silly child," put in Betty wisely.



But Dorothy scorned such a theory. "I guess I know how mice sound, after all I heard this summer, scurrying and hurrying inside our cottage walls. Besides, mice don't groan, Betty Wales. The next thing we heard was a groan—an awfully sad sound, you know, Betty. It scared me so that I tried to scream too, and the other two girls woke up. They said I only made a little squeak," explained the Smallest Sister proudly, "and of course if I had really screamed Kitty Carson would have heard, for all she sleeps so sound."

"And what did the ghost do then?" asked Betty.

"It just groaned once more louder than ever, and then it stopped, and everything was just awfully still. So I got into bed with Sarah and Helen, and I s'pose I went to sleep. But Shirley was so scared that she couldn't move, and she stayed awake and saw it."

"You mean she was so scared that she imagined that she saw it, dearie," Betty amended. "There aren't any ghosts, you know, really and truly, Dottie."

"Well, there are burglars," Dorothy in-

sisted, "and anyway, it wasn't a mouse. And what Shirley saw was a tall white ghost with its hands over its face—so." Dorothy illustrated graphically. "And in the morning we told Miss Dick, and she laughed, but Kitty Carson's window has a fire-escape, and she sleeps so sound that anybody could go in and out that way. We know she is just as scared as we are because there's a man come this very afternoon to put bars on her window."

"Well, then you'll be quite safe to-night," Betty assured her comfortably. "Didn't I ever tell you about our Scotch ghosts?"

"Yes, but please do it again," begged Dorothy, "because I've most forgotten, and then I can tell the girls. We're so interested in ghosts just now."

So Betty told about the ghost that Madeline and Mr. Dwight had invented to add the finishing touch to Babbie's ancestral castle at Oban. "Ghosts that little girls see are always like that," she ended, "just jokes that somebody has played for fun. If Shirley really saw anything it was some big girl who'd dressed up on purpose to frighten you little ones."

"It couldn't be." The Smallest Sister's tone was very positive. "There's a chimney next to our wall on Shirley's side where the noises were. No girl could crawl up a chimney. Nothing could get there but a ghost."

"Or a mouse," interpolated Betty sceptically.

"Mice don't groan," Dorothy reminded her. "If it was a girl—but it couldn't be, because how could a girl get in the chimney?—and Miss Dick ever finds out who it was, why, I shouldn't care to be in her shoes, I just guess! Shirley got so scared it made her sick. She's gone to the infirmary to-day."

"When she comes back you'd better put your cot near to hers, so she can reach out and wake you if she's ever frightened again," Betty advised. "It was selfish of you three to get into one bed and leave her alone."

"She could have come if she'd wanted to," the Smallest Sister defended herself. "We s'posed she wasn't a bit afraid when she stayed where she was, instead of her being too afraid to move."

"Well, next time be more thoughtful,"

Betty cautioned, and the Smallest Sister promised, and prepared to hop-skip back to school.

"Frisky and I walk together this week"—she explained her brief visit—"so I don't want to miss a single walk. I can go walking with you next week. Yes, I do hate two-and-two school walks 'most as much as ever I did, but it's different when I can walk with Frisky. I'll come again soon and tell you what we've discovered about the ghost," she called over her shoulder, as she vanished.

That evening the Thorn appeared in Betty's room, wearing her most provoking air—a combination of sympathy for Betty, offended dignity for herself, and a grim pleasure in showing up the shortcomings and inferiorities of her house mates.

"How did Mr. J. J. Morton make all his money?" she inquired, after a few moments' acrid criticism of the Purple Indian play, which had just been successfully repeated, by request, for the benefit of the Student's Aid treasury.

"Why, I don't know exactly," Betty answered idly. "Railroads, I think, and—and

stocks and bonds. The same way other rich men have made their money, I suppose."

"I guess it's tainted millions, all right." The Thorn's thin lips shut tight, and her sharp eyes fixed Betty's belligerently.

Betty only smiled at her good-humoredly. "Did you read Peggy Swift's article in the last 'Argus' on that subject? She makes you see how all money is tainted, in a way. But Mr. Morton is as fair and upright as he can be. He is splendid to the men who work for him, Mr. Thayer says. And he spends most of his time nowadays in superintending his charities."

"When he isn't spending it squeezing some small competitor to the wall, or whitewashing a corner," added the Thorn sententiously.

Betty considered this speech in bewildered silence. Her ideas of political economy were very hazy. Was it always wrong to get rid of competition, if you were smart enough to do it? she wondered. What in the world did a "corner" have to do with tainted money, and why should Mr. Morton be blamed for any interest he might have in a thing as innocent and necessary as whitewash?

"I didn't think you'd have anything to say to that," the Thorn proceeded triumphantly, after a minute. "Besides, I've got proof of every word I say. We aren't going to be happy in this house. It's haunted—by the spirits of those he has wronged, I suppose."

"Matilda Thorn—I mean Jones," began Betty, letting Jim's name pop out before she thought, in her annoyance, "don't be so ridiculous. I can't argue about Mr. Morton's business methods because I don't know enough about them, and neither do you. But President Wallace does, and he accepted this house very gladly for Harding College. Furthermore, you accepted a place in it very gladly—yours was the first name on my list. So I think it is very inconsistent of you, as well as very ungracious, to criticize Mr. Morton now. But when you talk about this house being haunted you are simply making yourself ridiculous. Please explain what you mean by saying such a thing."

The Thorn listened to Betty's stern arraignment with growing amazement. She had "sized up" the new secretary as "one of

the pretty, easy-going kind," and had vastly enjoyed worrying her with ill-grounded complaints, which had always been treated with a sweet seriousness that the Thorn had found very diverting. Now she realized that she had gone too far, and she rose to retreat, rallying her scattered forces into a semblance of order.

"I'm sorry I've offended you, Miss Wales," she said humbly. "I didn't remember that Mr. Morton was a friend of yours. I haven't any friends of his sort—he seems to belong in another world from mine. I didn't mean to be rude—or ungrateful—or ridiculous."

Betty held out her hand impulsively. Being perfectly sincere and simple herself, she could never have guessed at the strange complexity of motives that actuated the Thorn. "Then if you didn't mean it, it's all right," she said. "So please sit down and tell me what you think Mr. Morton has done that isn't honest, and I'll ask him about it—or I'll ask President Wallace to explain it to us. And then tell me what makes you say that Morton Hall is haunted." Betty's sense

of humor nearly overcame her dignity at this point, and the last word ended in a chuckle that she hastily converted into a cough. Ghosts seemed to be dogging her path to-day.

The Thorn sat down again majestically. "Well," she began uncertainly, "I'm not sure that I know anything in particular about Mr. Morton's methods. All great fortunes are founded on trickery, in my opinion. A great many other people seem to think so too, according to all that you read. And when the girls on the top floor began to hear ghosts walking and talking and unlocking locked doors, why, I suppose I put two and two together—that's all. Some way you always associate ghosts with wicked men. Of course it might be Miss Bond who was haunted, instead of Mr. Morton's money."

"But Miss Jones," broke in Betty in amazement, "you don't really believe in ghosts, do you? My little sister has just been here with a story of how some of Miss Dick's girls were frightened last night by mysterious noises. It's bad enough for children as big as she is to think they've seen ghosts, but for Harding girls ——"



The Thorn shrugged her shoulders dubiously. "That's what I said myself when I first heard about it, but yesterday in evening study-hour I was up there, and we certainly heard the queerest whisperings and mutterings coming from the tower room. We were sure Miss Bond was in there alone, so we knocked to see if she was sick or wanted anything. She didn't answer, and we finally tried the door and it was locked, as usual. So we banged and banged, and we were just going to call Mrs. Post when Miss Bond finally came—and she was all alone and hadn't been studying elocution or reading her Lit. out loud. She said she hadn't heard anything either, except the racket we made, but I noticed she didn't act much as if she meant it. She's so secretive she'd keep even a ghost to herself, probably," ended the Thorn vindictively.

Betty advanced the mice-in-the-walls theory, only to have it scoffed aside, with a variation of the Smallest Sister's argument: "Mice do not whisper and mutter; they scramble and squeak." She suggested that the sounds came from another study; that

had been carefully investigated. She hastily dismissed the suspicion that the Mystery had misled them about being alone. In the first place she felt sure that the Mystery was honest; in the second place the Thorn, as if reading her thoughts, explained how they had hunted through the closet and even looked under the bed.

"Well, you will have to keep your ghosts, then," Betty laughed finally. "Only don't throw the blame on poor Mr. Morton or on Miss Bond, who didn't hear anything. Why, maybe it's you they're haunting. The people who hear things are the ones to worry about being responsible, I should say."

The Thorn refused to turn the matter into a pleasantry. "They've all heard the noises," she explained, "the girls who room on the third floor. They asked me to come up last night and see what I thought."

"And then speak to me?" asked Betty, annoyed that the Thorn should have been honored with an official mission.

"Well—if I thought best," the Thorn admitted.

"All right," said Betty cheerfully. "You

can tell them what I've said—particularly what I think about the silliness of believing in ghosts. If they are troubled by any more noises, they can let me or Mrs. Post know, and we'll look into it."

"People do get the queerest ideas into their heads," she sighed, when the Thorn had departed. "To-day it's ghosts, ghosts everywhere, and to-morrow it will be something else."

To-morrow's trouble, as it proved when to-morrow came, was inspirations. Babbie had one—quite unrelated of course to the fact that she and Mr. Thayer could not agree about the prettiest furnishings for a library—to the effect that her mother was lonely and needed the society of her only child. And Madeline had one, which took the form of a plot for a drama that was certain to make Broadway "sit up and take notice."

"But, Madeline," Betty begged, "you can write that later. It's getting very close to Christmas. You've got to take charge of the Tally-ho's gift-shop department again. The Morton Hall girls will help, but they're no good at planning. And neither am I."

"Make the things we planned last year," suggested Madeline promptly.

"You know that won't do, Madeline," Betty told her sternly. "All our best customers have bought dozens of extra-special candle-shades and Cupid cards and stenciled blotters. We can have some of those, for freshmen or girls who didn't get around to buy last year. But it will all seem stale and left over and silly if we don't have some grand new specialties. Please, Madeline!"

Madeline frowned darkly and shook her head. "Ever since that tea-shop was started, I have sacrificed my Literary Career to its needs. Now I revolt. I'm going to write my play while I'm in the mood. If I should finish before Christmas, why, then I'll help with the gift-shop business, not otherwise."

"What shall I do?" sighed Betty. "The gift shop pays splendidly. We can't let it go, because if we do we shall make less money than we did last year, and then Mrs. Hildreth and Mrs. Bob would be disappointed. Besides, I've been promising some of my girls a regular harvest from it."

"Mary Brooks invented a pretty candle-

shade last year," Madeline reminded her. "Tell her that she's the Perfect Patron, and must dress the part. Command her to come to the rescue of the gift shop."

"I shall ask her to come and talk to you," Betty murmured under her breath.

But even Mary's lively arguments left Madeline unmoved.

"If it was an order that you'd had for a play," Mary told her calmly, "I wouldn't say a word. But you're only wasting your time on a forlorn hope, just when you might be doing something really useful. I shall cross my thumbs at you and your old play."

"You may cross your thumbs all you want to," Madeline defied her smilingly. "Before the winter is over you'll be sitting in a box at my Broadway opening—that is, if I'm magnanimous enough to ask you, after all the beautiful encouragement you're giving me."

"But, Madeline"—Mary was nothing if not persistent—"what makes you think you can write a play, when all your stories have come back, except a few of those college ones? A play is any amount harder to write than a short story."

Madeline smiled back at her confidently. "Maybe I agree with you, little Mary. But in the first place every Tom, Dick and Harry is writing good short stories nowadays, and nobody is writing extra good plays. In the second place, I have discovered the secret of writing natural but amusing dialogue."

"And I suppose you know all there is to be known about stage-craft," added Mary, in her most sarcastic tones.

"I've seen every good thing in New York ever since I could talk," Madeline announced calmly. "Besides, I am going down to New York later to look up the stage business. But first I'm going to get the play all written. I'm afraid the original touch would tumble out if I carried it to New York in my head. And then," she added mysteriously, "I couldn't use my secret method about dialogue so well in New York."

"Madeline Ayres," Mary told her solemnly, "you are the most provoking person I know. You have mooned around here all the fall, doing footless little stunts for anybody that asked you. Now, when Betty and the Tallyho need you, you are under the spell of the

most untimely inspiration that I've ever heard of your having."

"I guess the Vagabonds would like to hear you call the Pageant I wrote for them footless," declared Madeline in injured tones, "and if any college play ever took better than the Purple Indians——"

"Of course your stunts are all perfectly lovely," Mary hastened to assure her. "You're the most provoking but also pretty nearly the most interesting of all the B. C. A.'s. Isn't she, Betty? I'll cross my thumbs for your play instead of against it, Madeline."

"Thanks," said Madeline briefly. "I'm writing it for Agatha Dwight."

Betty and Mary exchanged glances of utter amazement. Agatha Dwight was the idol of Harding and of two continents besides. The leading playwrights of England and America wrote for her, and the greatest of them felt highly honored when her capricious taste singled out a piece of his for production.

"And the moral of that is," said Mary at last, "aim at a star, because it's no disgrace if you miss her. Pun not noticed until it was too late to withdraw the epigram. Come on,

Betty, and fix up the workroom. It's lucky that George Garrison Hinsdale is writing another of his horribly learned papers this month, so I can be down here as much as I like. This one is on the aberrations of Genius. I shall suggest untimely inspirations as an important subhead, and invite Madeline up to discuss it with him. Meanwhile our only hope is that she'll get sick of her play and come to our rescue, and do you know, Betty Wales, I shall be most desperately disappointed if she does."

Betty laughed. "I suppose she oughtn't to waste her time on fussy little things like gift-shop specialties if she can really do big things like plays for Agatha Dwight. But she is so splendid at everything."

"And the moral of that is," said Mary, "be splendid at everything and you'll be wanted, no matter how provoking you are at times. I should like to have been a genius myself, only George Garrison Hinsdale says he prefers near-geniuses as wives. Now, Betty Wales, what do you say to a plushkin candle-shade for this year's extra-special feature?"



## CHAPTER XI

### WHAT CHRISTMAS REALLY MEANS

THE Terrible Ten began it. Eleanor Watson had forgotten to bring either peanuts or taffy to their class, and the Arithmetic lesson flagged in consequence, until finally, in despair, she sent Rafael out to buy some refreshments.

"How's your father to-night, Pietro?" she asked, while they waited. Pietro Senior had slipped on the ice on his way home from work and sprained his wrist badly.

"Better, I tink," Pietro reported stolidly, his thoughts all on peanuts to come.

"Dat's nottings—lit' wrist splain," Giuseppe announced. "My fader, he had a hand cut off—so."

"My fader go to de hospital. Hava big cutting." Nicolo illustrated a "big cutting" vividly with a dangerous swing of his villainous-looking jack-knife.

"My moder she hava two operations dis year."

"My sister she have tree."

Rafael had arrived during the debate, but not even the bag of peanuts he set down before Eleanor could distract attention from the bitter rivalry in misfortune. In a minute Rafael too had caught the trend of it.

"Waita lil minute," he cried, glowering angrily round the circle. "Looka my hand. Dat's one. My lil sister she died dis year. My muvver she go to hospital. And my big sister, she work to Cannon's fer der Christmas trade. She say she rather die, she so tired every night, an' it get worse an' worse an' worse every day till it be Christmas."

"Dat so," agreed Pietro solemnly. "My sister she work dar too. Doan get home till ten, leben o'clock."

Cannon's was the big cheap department store down near the station. Eleanor took mental note of the Ten's opinion of its treatment of employees, and resolved to ask Mr. Thayer if the girls who worked there really had such a hard time as their small brothers thought. Meanwhile she stopped the ridiculous operation contest with many peanuts. The Ten, being very bright boys, though ig-

norant of books, had speedily discovered that the bigger numbers you could add right, the faster you could secure large quantities of peanuts. Also, they humbly worshipped the Lovely Lady, whom Rafael had refused to let them call "de peach." They came regularly to their class, they listened spellbound to the adventures of Robin Hood, they wrote the names of Robin and all his band—also their own and the Lovely Lady's—without a slip, and when Eleanor declared that nothing would make her so happy as to hear them read the tale of King Arthur and his knights to her out of a book, they set themselves at learning "dose queer book letters" with a will.

"First fellah dat bothers my Lovely Lada, I fixa him," Rafael had announced at the end of the third lesson.

"Why she your lovely lada?" demanded Pietro mockingly, dodging behind a telegraph pole for safety.

"'Cause I lika her de most," Rafael declared, "and she goan lika me de most. You jus' wait."

But after that one assertion of proprietor-

ship, he changed "my" to "the," and impressed the revision upon his friends and followers with terrible threats. Rafael's eyes were brown and melting, his voice was of a liquid softness, his smile as sunny as the skies of his native land. But when he scowled all the fierceness of Sicilian feuds and vendettas flashed out of his deep eyes and straightened his mouth into a cruel, hard line. No wonder the Ten shivered and cowered before the wrath of Rafael, supplemented by the flash of a sharp little dagger that Eleanor, who had been entirely reassured by Mr. Thayer, little suspected the dearest of her dear, curly-haired comical Ten to be carrying inside his gray shirt.

After the class that evening, Eleanor asked Mr. Thayer about Cannon's.

"Well, I suppose they are pretty hard on their girls," he said. "Standing up all day waiting on tired, irritable customers who have to make every penny count, with fifteen minutes off for lunch in the busy season, can't be exactly fun. Then in the evening I suppose they have to go back to straighten up their stock of goods, move things around to

show them off better, trim up the windows, and so on. Christmas means something quite different from a gay holiday with a big dinner and a lot of pretty presents to those girls and to lots of others, Miss Watson. If the Christmas rush is bad at Cannon's, it must be perfect torture in the big city shops."

Next day Eleanor persuaded Madeline, who could always be detached from her work to investigate a real novelty, to go with her to Cannon's.

"If we want to ask the clerks any questions, you can do it safely in Italian, or any other language," Eleanor urged. "They're mostly foreigners, I think."

Madeline nodded. "And I might find the type ——" Her voice trailed off into silence, and her face wore a far-away, inscrutable look. Writing a play for Miss Dwight certainly made a person very absent-minded, and one's conversation very inconsecutive—also one's actions. Madeline suddenly decided to buy a hat, and dragged Eleanor from one shop to another without finding anything to please her difficult taste, so that it was almost dark when they reached Cannon's.

The big store was packed with shoppers. The air was clammy and stale ; the counters were a mass of soiled and dingy merchandise. Tiny cash-girls ran wearily to and fro, elbowing a difficult way through the jam in the narrow aisles. Behind the counters pale-faced clerks eyed the customers savagely, and attended with languid insolence to their wants.

Eleanor sniffed the air daintily. "What an awful place, Madeline! Where do all these shoppers come from? I don't feel a bit as if I were in Harding."

"From Factory Hill, I suppose, and from across the tracks where the French settlement is. Let's go to the toy department and buy Fluffy a doll. I'm sure they'll have something unique to add to her collection."

Eleanor stood near the door, hesitating. "It's horribly smelly. You don't think we shall catch anything, do you?"

Madeline laughed. "You'd never do to go really and truly slumming, Eleanor. No, we shan't catch anything, probably. Come along. I thought you wanted to investigate this place."

So Eleanor bravely "came along." They bought a penny doll for Fluffy, from a sad-eyed little clerk who told them she was "tired most to death working nights," and then, when a floor-walker appeared suddenly from around a corner, took it all back and declared loudly that business was fine this year and she liked the rush of "somethin' doin'."

On the way down-stairs—Eleanor had firmly refused to get into one of Cannon's elevators—they came upon a girl crying bitterly.

"What's the matter?" Madeline asked in the friendly, companionable way that always got her answers.

"I've been fined again," the girl sobbed. "Ten cents ain't so much, but neither is four dollars. That's what I get. I've been fined three times this week. What for? Why, once for being late in the morning—it's awful easy to sleep over when you've been working late at night—and once for sitting down on the ledge behind the counter. It's against the rules to sit down, you know. And this time it was for talking back to an inspector who said my check was wrong. It

wasn't. If it had been, I'd have been fined for that."

Eleanor had been hunting through her pocketbook.

"Please take this," she said, "and don't cry any more. Can't you get off to-night and have a good rest?"

The girl shook her head vigorously, smiling at Eleanor through her tears. "I'd lose my job like that, ma'am. I ain't any worse off than the others; only it did make me sick to lose the money when I got so many depending on me—my old grandmother and two kid brothers—and I wanted to make a little Christmas for the kids. Thank you an awful lot, ma'am."

The girls went on their way fairly bursting with indignation.

"The idea of fining her for sitting down to rest!" sputtered Madeline. "And for being late, when she's worked half the night before, it's outrageous!"

Eleanor had quite forgotten the odors and the risk of infection. "Let's buy some ribbon," she suggested. "That counter seems to be the hub of the shopping fray."



So they bought ribbon of a dark-eyed, dark-haired beauty who proved to be Pietro's sister. She beamed on Eleanor, and in the safe foreign tongue confided to Madeline that Cannon's was certainly a bad place to work. She could look out for herself, she explained, flashing an imperious glance at an inspector. She brought in lots of Italian trade, and could interpret both in Italian and French for the women who hadn't learned English. So they treated her better. Oh, they fined her, of course—that was the rule—and she worked most nights. But she was pretty sure of keeping her place, whatever happened. That was a big help. They should see the dirty hole of a lunch-room before they left, she called gleefully after them, under the very eye of the fat little man whom she had pointed out as Mr. Cannon. It was certainly "a big help" to be able to utter wholesome truths like that with impunity.

"Let's go and reason with him," suggested Madeline, looking angrily after the fat little proprietor. "Let's make him take us to see the dirty hole of a rest-room. Let's threaten to boycott him if he doesn't reform his ways."

Eleanor looked very much frightened. "We should only get the girls we've talked to into trouble. The boycott wouldn't work because we've never bought anything anyway until to-day. I—I think I'm beginning to feel faint, Madeline. Let's go home and talk it over with Betty and Mr. Thayer. They'll think of just the right thing to do."

But Mr. Thayer had gone to Boston, via Babbie Hildreth's, and it was Eugenia Ford's plan that, after much discussion, was settled upon, for the reason, as Madeline put it, that it was "just wild enough to work."

So after chapel the next morning Eugenia, Georgia, and Fluffy—Straight had tearfully decided not to cut Logic—chaperoned by Betty, appeared at Cannon's and asked to see the head of the firm.

"Good-morning, Mr. Cannon," said Georgia in businesslike tones, when he appeared. "We've got a proposition to make to you. We three are Harding girls, and this is Miss Wales, secretary of the Student's Aid Society, —also proprietor of the Tally-ho Tea-Shop."

"Indeed! Charmed to meet you, I'm sure." The fat little man bowed low and

smiled a fatuous, oily smile. "Anything I can do in the way of canned goods, crackers, sweets—to the sweet, ladies." He bowed and smiled again.

"We want to ask a favor," pursued Georgia, utterly ignoring his courtesies. "We all have pretty good times generally, and very merry Christmases. We want other girls to have the same. We have just lately realized how hard it is for salespeople just at this time of year—how Christmas means to them just terribly hard work for little or no extra pay—and we want to help at least a few of them. So we've gotten up a petition about shopping early in the day, and early in the season, for the Harding girls to sign. Now we also want to arrange to come down and help some of your girls out. We want to take the places of three of them every day from twelve to one, so that they can get a good rest at noon, and also from five to six, so they can, if possible, do any extra work they have then and so avoid night work. If not, they can at least start fresh for the evening."

Mr. Cannon stared at Georgia in utter amazement. Suddenly his fat face grew red,

and he shouted angrily, "Who's been talkin' to you? You know an awful lot about my business, don't you, now? You'd better clear out."

"Without the canned goods and crackers and sweets—for the sweet?" asked Fluffy gaily, looking down at him with her fascinating, insolent smile.

"We've talked to no one, Mr. Cannon," put in little Eugenia earnestly.

"And we mean to help you too, as is only fair, if you are good enough to give us the chance to help the girls," added Betty, with quiet dignity.

Mr. Cannon glowered at the circle of pretty, serious, half-frightened faces.

"You don't know nothing about clerking," he sputtered at last. "Nice mess you'd make of your hours! Nice kind of help you'd hand out to me!"

"I was a waitress once," Fluffy informed him calmly, winking at Betty. "The young woman I worked for said I was very good at it. Besides, all my little friends came and patronized me. If you'll let me try, I'll ask them to patronize me here."

"We don't expect pay," Georgia explained, "and the first day we come we'd just be extras, watching to see what our duties would be."

"Don't be silly, Mr. Cannon," urged Fluffy, who was never in the least daunted by opposition. "We'll accomplish more in an hour than these poor dragged-out girls ever do—even if we don't understand the difficult art of clerking," she added maliciously. "And they'll do more in their afternoons, after they've had a chance to rest. What you want is your money's worth, isn't it? The best service for the smallest wages. Don't ——"

"See here," Mr. Cannon cut her short, "let's have a little talk. What did you come here for to-day?" He pointed a pudgy finger at Fluffy, who explained once more, in picturesque phrases, the idea they had had in coming to interview him.

"You say you've been a waitress?"

Fluffy nodded, winking solemnly again at Betty.

"You're not a labor organizer?"

With equal solemnity she denied the charge.

"Far as I can see, you're more or less lunny."

If you want to, you can try. Come to-day at twelve. If you get along, maybe the others can take hold. Some o' my girls are fagged, for sure, and if your little friends, as you call them, come in, that'll help some. I've always said," added Mr. Cannon proudly, "that if I could once get the college trade to swing my way, I could keep it. Honest values for cash is my motto." And with a curt little nod he started off.

"Wait!" Fluffy arrested his progress. "You mean I'm to come and not the others?"

Mr. Cannon nodded. "As the most likely specimen. I don't believe in beginning any new experiment on too sumptuous a scale." This time he was irrevocably gone.

Fluffy wore a comical air of dismay. "Gracious! Doing it all alone isn't at all my idea of a stunt. I shall be terribly scared and lonely. Straight's got to spend the entire hour buying things of me. Oh, dear! She can't, because it's a cash store and we haven't any money left. I wonder, if I should tell him I had a twin, whether he wouldn't let her try to-day too."

"No time," said Georgia firmly. "Psych. 6 beckons. But you shan't be deserted. We'll take up a contribution for Straight to spend."

Fluffy's experiment in social service was the sensation of the Harding morning. Promptly at twelve she appeared, and was given the place of a wan little girl behind the ribbon counter. Ten minutes later—she had stipulated for that interval in which to learn how to "work" her cash-book—the "college trade" appeared in the persons of a lively delegation conducted by the triumphant Straight, all eagerness to display her adored twin in this new and exciting rôle. They bought ribbons recklessly, with much delicious professional encouragement from Fluffy. They smiled cheerfully upon Mr. Cannon, who lurked in the offing, watching the progress of his "new experiment" with amazed interest. Piloted by Eleanor Watson, they ascended to the doll counter, and provided themselves with souvenirs of the occasion in the shape of dancing dolls which twirled fascinatingly about a central magnet on top of a little tin box. There had been nothing so

nice at the regular toy store, they declared loudly, for Mr. Cannon's benefit. At one they escorted the weary Fluffy triumphantly to the Tally-ho for luncheon.

"He tried to hire me for all the afternoons," explained Fluffy proudly, "and he says the rest of you may come, and Straight too, seeing she's my twin; but no more. He doesn't believe in trying noo experiments on too sumptoos a scale," mimicked Fluffy joyously.

A good many things besides the easing of the lots of a few tired sales-girls came of the "noo experiment." One was a queer friendship that sprang up between Fluffy and Mr. Cannon, cemented by a compact, on Fluffy's part, hereafter to "trade for cash," which Mr. Cannon considered the only honest way of living, and, on Mr. Cannon's, to accept Mr. Thayer's offer of rooms in the club-house where classes in embroidery and music and some amusement clubs might be enjoyed by Mr. Cannon's girls. Then Madeline's "Sunday Special" article on the Harding girls' practical way of helping those less fortunate was copied and discussed through the whole



country ; and many women and men who had never given the matter a thought before realized that shop-girls are human and began treating them as if they were.

Meanwhile Betty Wales, seeing another application of the same principle, got together the committee on the Proper Excitement of the Idle Rich and made them a proposition.

"A store in New York wants two thousand plushkin candle-shades before Christmas. They won't handle less than a thousand. Six Morton Hall girls are working their heads off to get them ready in time—that means that the last shipment must go by the fifteenth. Why can't you help them out by having some candle-shade bees?"

"I haven't had a chance to do one thing for Christmas myself," objected Georgia sadly.

"Do you usually make all your presents?" demanded Mary Brooks incisively. "You know you never touch one of them. As the presiding genius of the gift-shop department and the one and only Perfect Patron of the Tally-ho I am bound to help this Excitement along. It's simply absurd for you to rush down to Cannon's every day, and then refuse

to help the girls in this very college who are just as tired and just as much tied down by this horrible Christmas tradition of buying things all in a heap, regardless of the people who have to make them then, or starve. The first bee can be at my house," ended Mary sweetly, "and there will be perfectly good refreshments."

The bees accomplished wonders, but it was still a struggle to finish the candle-shades in time; and when the Thorn cut her hand and the wound got poisoned and wouldn't heal, things seemed nearly hopeless. But little Eugenia Ford came nobly to the rescue. "There's no rule against getting up at three in the morning," she said, and for six consecutive days she woke herself heroically at that hour, and cut, pasted, and put together candle-shades until dawn, hardly taking time for breakfast, but never neglecting her college work—she had learned her lesson about that.

At three o'clock on the afternoon of Sunday, the sixteenth, Eugenia hung out a busy sign and curled up on her couch for a much needed nap. When she woke again, it was

almost dark. She had promised to go to Vespers with Helena Mason.

"I'm afraid I'm late, but she might have called for me," reflected Eugenia, getting rapidly into a trailing blue broadcloth dress, which, with a big plumed hat, silver-fox furs, and a huge bunch of violets, was calculated to make a very favorable impression upon the Vespers audience.

When she was ready, Eugenia consulted a diminutive watch. "Quarter to seven!" Her expression of consternation gave way suddenly to relief. "I remember now that it was two hours fast. No—I changed it. Well, it's surely all wrong." Eugenia dashed down the hall to Helena Mason's room. Her hurried knock was answered by a rather grudging "Come in."

"I'm very sorry to be late," Eugenia began apologetically.

Miss Mason sat at her desk, writing busily. She turned her head at last, and stared hard at Eugenia.

"I should say you were early myself," she observed, "but why the plumes and the train?"

Eugenia seized a tiny alarm clock that stood on the floor by the bed, which, for some strange reason, was not made up—at Vespers time on Sunday.

“It is quarter to seven,” she cried aghast. “Why didn’t you call me, and why isn’t it dark, and what do you mean by saying I’m early for Vespers?”

“Eugenia Ford, are you crazy?” inquired Miss Mason sternly.

Poor Eugenia looked ready to cry. “I don’t think I am. Tell me what I’m early for, please.”

“Breakfast, of course,” explained Miss Mason. “I got up at six to copy this theme. It’s now almost seven—there’s the rising bell this minute. As for Vespers, now you speak of it I do remember that you promised to call for me, but I went to the Westcott for dinner yesterday and to Vespers right from there, without ever thinking of our engagement.”

Eugenia sank down limply on the disheveled bed. “Then I’ve slept since three o’clock yesterday,” she announced tragically, “in my kimono, on top of my couch, you

know. I never heard of such a thing, did you?"

The Thorn certainly never had, and she was much impressed.

"I always supposed that rich girls like Miss Ford just thought of clothes and dances and traveling and a good time generally," she confided to Betty. "I never thought one of them would wear herself out helping poor little me. You've got to be pretty tired to sleep like that. I shall always feel differently about rich girls after this."

And she kept her word. The Thorn's sharp point was dulled. Instead of being a faultfinder and an agitator she threw her influence, which for some obscure reason was considerable, on the side of harmony and good-fellowship.

"I've told the third floor to stop spying on Esther Bond," she informed Betty. "I'm convinced myself that she studies out loud, and for some queer reason doesn't want it known. She's awfully secretive. That Helena Mason goes up to see her quite a lot. You'd think she'd be proud of knowing a prominent girl like Miss Mason, but she

smuggles her in and out as if she was a poor relation. All the same, I guess the way she acts is her own affair. She hasn't said much, but she must know she's being watched, and I've advised them all to stop it. She looks as if she had troubles enough without that. I've been reading up about ghosts, and they do seem to be pretty much made up, specially all those seen by several people at one time. Did Miss Dick's school ever find out about theirs?"

Betty shook her head. "The poor little girl who got the most frightened by it has been terribly ill. They thought last week that she was going to die, but she's much better now."

"Some other girl must be feeling pretty bad, if it was done for a joke," said the Thorn.

"Yes," agreed Betty, "but Miss Dick thinks it was an accident—and little Shirley's strong imagination, of course. I hope she's right. And thank you for taking Miss Bond's part. We don't want our silly ghosts to hurt any one's feelings or make any girl sorry she came to Morton Hall."

## CHAPTER XII

### RAFAEL PROPOSES

MADLINE worked on her play with the furious industry of the "digs" she had always ridiculed. The floor of her room was littered with dusty sheets of manuscript, which she mysteriously informed her landlady must not be touched, or "the world and all would be lost." She took long, solitary walks, sat for hours at her desk or the Tally-ho's, alternately staring hopelessly into space, or frantically covering reams of papers with her pretty illegible writing. Occasionally she emerged from her closely-guarded solitude and gave a tea-drinking for the B. C. A.'s, at which she adroitly turned the conversation to the strangest topics; or she bundled some long-suffering friend off with her on an endless shopping tour or trolley ride, during which she listened in complete absorption to chance bits of dialogue, coming home with a delicious new monologue for which she insisted on an im-

mediate audience, "to test the note of reality," she explained vaguely.

One day just before Christmas she was caught by Mary Brooks in a mellow mood and dragged off to dinner, to give Dr. Hinsdale a practical demonstration of some of the idiosyncrasies of genius. And after Dr. Hinsdale had gone to his study, over the second round of coffee by the open fire, she explained her newest literary device to the bewildered Mary.

"When I do stunty pageants for my friends to act and footless little playlets that don't matter," she began, "I just dash them off without thinking and they turn out beautifully. But somehow the idea of writing seriously for publication stiffens me all up inside and muddles my ideas. Heroine always turns into a freak or a prig on my hands. Hero gets hysterical when I try to make him earnest. But now when things begin to go wrong, I calmly tear up what I've written, and go out and make my little pals talk off the next scene to me, or at least recall to my mind how real conversation sounds. The awfully romantic, lover-y parts I either have to overhear or ex-



tract from people who don't know me. The girl at Cannon's who is the model for my heartless coquette little guesses her proud mission in life."

"I should call that just cold-blooded cribbing," declared Mary indignantly.

"Cold-blooded cribbing from life is the very top notch of art," Madeline assured her. "My play is a slice from life. I suppose it's because I'm young and inexperienced that I have to keep stopping to refer to life so often as I go along."

"Am I in it anywhere?" demanded Mary eagerly.

"You and the girl at Cannon's and Fluffy Dutton and Betty are the principal ingredients in the heroine," explained Madeline. "But I defy you to have discovered it for yourself, and I swear you to eternal secrecy, because people would misunderstand. Life with a big 'L' is the kind I'm cribbing; I should scorn, of course, to put my friends and their petty affairs into a play."

Mary drew her smooth brows into a puzzled frown. "I suppose I shall understand all that when I see the play," she said with a

sigh. "George Garrison Hinsdale would better be saving up for a trip to New York before long, including a box party to the first night of your slice from life."

"You'll have to wait till the second night if you want a box," Madeline told her calmly. "All the boxes are spoken for on the first night, and there will be several parties in the seats, besides."

This calm assumption of success made Mary gasp and engage her husband, later in the evening, in an intricate discussion of the distinction between the serene self-assurance of genius and the ordinary man's unjustified conceit.

Eleanor Watson wanted to join Jim in New York. He was sure of being there for several months, he wrote her, and equally sure of being sent off to "some miserable hole" in the early spring.

"Beating the firm's time-limit on Morton Hall," he wrote, "is about the unluckiest thing I ever did. They've written me down for a hustler, and slated me for all the forlorn hopes. Remind Betty that she owes me a good long letter for that."

The thing that kept Eleanor at Harding was of course the devotion of the Terrible Ten to her and to education under her auspices. In vain she had introduced other story-tellers; the evenings that she stayed away to give Mr. Thayer's most promising candidates a trial were tumultuous revolts, or, after she had patiently explained to the class how unhappy their disorderly conduct made her, spiritless sessions, endured because the smouldering fire in Rafael's eyes commanded outward submission from the Ten.

"But if you really leave I'm afraid they'll all backslide again," said Mr. Thayer, "and you see they're on probation now to the very end of their course. Did Rafael tell you that he'd had another raise? That boy does the work of two men, in spite of his bad hand—runs the most difficult machine in the factory, and makes repairs that we used to have to get a man up from Boston to attend to."

"How old is he?" asked Eleanor idly.

"Eighteen, he thinks. They're all older than they look or act."

Eleanor sighed. "They won't be able to meet the reading requirements of the factory

law for six weeks yet, and they ought to be induced to keep on all winter—certainly the ones who are bright enough at their work to have any future before them. But it does seem absurd for me to stay on here just because ten young Italians listen to my stories and eat my peanuts.”

“And appreciate the tact and understanding that you bestow so generously, mixed with the peanuts and the stories,” added Mr. Thayer soberly.

That night Eleanor went to Mr. Thayer’s office after the class to have one more consultation with him about its future. When she came back for her coat and hat a stealthy figure slipped past her in the hall.

“Did you forget something, Rafael?” she asked, recognizing her favorite pupil.

Rafael muttered something unintelligible and hurried off, but his return was explained when Eleanor found a neatly folded note tucked in the sleeve of her coat.

“Der Mis”—it began, “I luv yu. i haf nuther raz. I keep you good lik lada. Wil yu haf me to mary, if not I die

“Yur RAFAEL.

"I tak 1 hor a day for wik to make thiz note rite."

Eleanor read the pathetic little missive through with growing dismay. He had misunderstood her kindness—the pictures she had given him to brighten the dark little hovel where he and his family lived, the Thanksgiving dinner she had sent them, the special smile she always had ready when he appeared at the club. She started to show her note to Mr. Thayer, then changed her mind.

After all, Rafael was in earnest, and she would treat his proposal like any other. It should be a secret between them. She would think out for herself some kindly way of explaining that she could not "haf" him "to mary," and that he must not die of a broken heart.

The next evening when the class met she smiled at him just as usual, and catching his eye early in the evening slipped a note, folded as his had been, under his cap.

In it she had printed, in short easy words that Rafael could read, how sorry she was to

disappoint him, how she liked him for a friend, how he must forget what he had written and work hard to make the Italian girl whom he would love some day proud and happy and comfortable.

"I can't treat it as absurd," she had decided, "and I can't be cross to him. He means it all, and he doesn't dream how comical it is. I only hope he won't be too excited to read what I've written."

Evidently he was not, for just as Eleanor, having said good-night to the Harding girls who had walked up the hill with her from their classes, was turning in at her own door, Rafael glided out from the shadow of the house and stood in her path.

"Der is no hope?" he demanded tragically, standing bareheaded before her.

"Oh, Rafael," Eleanor remonstrated, "I always speak the truth to you, don't I? I wrote you a note because you wrote me one; and now you ask me if I mean it. Why, dear boy, I'm almost old enough to be your mother."

"I love you," Rafael told her stoutly.

"Then please me by acting sensible. You're

much too young to think about marrying and I ——”

“You luf anodder,” broke in Rafael accusingly.

Eleanor flushed pink under cover of the darkness. Hardly to herself even did she admit the part that Richard Blake played in her thoughts. Indeed so skilfully had she concealed it that Dick Blake, working day and night to push “The Quiver” to the top of the magazine world, was wont to smile scornfully to himself when he thought how little he and his valiant efforts meant to the girl who, in all his hopes and plans and dreams, was to share his future.

But in a swift moment’s consideration Eleanor decided that the best way to cure this sentimental little Italian boy of his infatuation was to let him know that he had indeed a successful rival. Telling Rafael was different from admitting it to any one else—because Rafael was foolishly in love too.

She stretched out her hand impulsively and patted his shoulder. “Yes, Rafael,” she whispered softly, “I’m in love with somebody else. But he doesn’t know it yet, and

I'm not sure that he cares for me. Nobody knows it but you, and I'm telling you because I ——"

"Good-bye, lovely lada, good-bye." Rafael caught the hand that lay on his shoulder, kissed it in his passionate, foreign fashion, and glided away into the darkness.

Eleanor stood looking after him with the curious sensation of being the heroine of a pretty old-time romance that belonged in a fairy world of magic and moonlight, and ought to be set to the tinkling music of guitars. And just as she had put out her light and gone to bed, still smiling at the whimsicality of the whole affair, and particularly of her having confided to Rafael her carefully-secreted feeling for Dick—who would do beautifully for the brave young prince of the fairy-tale the music came. The Terrible Ten were grouped under the window singing soft, crooning Italian songs to their Lovely Lada. Giuseppi had traveled with his father one summer in a troupe of street musicians; it was his fingers that picked a bit uncertainly at the guitar's strings, and little Nicolo's wonderful voice, rising sweet and true above the



others, that led the chorus. But Rafael stood in the centre of the half circle, his angelic face touched with light from a down-stairs window, and the sob and the thrill in the music, that brought a lump to Eleanor's throat and a mist over her eyes, was all in Rafael's voice, singing out his love and longing to the cruel lady who would not "haf" him "to mary."

Eleanor had a bunch of red roses on her table that the adoring Eugenia Ford had sent her, and she tossed them down to the singers, who laughed and cheered in most unromantic boy fashion, and finally departed, leaving Eleanor to wonder how Rafael had explained the serenade to his followers, and how he would treat her at the next club meeting. She little guessed what would happen before then.

For the next morning before she was dressed an apologetic parlor-maid escorted a weeping Italian girl to Eleanor's door. It was Pietro's flashing-eyed sister, her beauty tear-stained and her proud confidence quite vanished.

"Rafael's hurt," she sobbed. "Black Hand maybe, we think. He don't know nothing,

but he moan your name with his eyes shut. Would you come?"

Of course she would come. She hurried the maid off after the best doctor in Harding, and she and the beautiful Maria went at once to Rafael, who lay tossing in delirium on his blood-stained bed, a terrible gash across his throat, which had been roughly bandaged by an old Italian herb doctor. Nobody, it seemed, guessed what had really happened, though when some one found a tiny dagger under the bed Pietro and Nicolo interchanged curious glances. They had recognized it as the one with which Rafael had struck terror to the hearts of the Ten and compelled their rigid obedience.

Eleanor installed a trained nurse, made the doctor promise to give the case his best attention, and went off to find her unfailing standby in troublous times, Betty Wales. For Rafael was beyond knowing anybody, perhaps for all time, and she felt like a criminal when his mother kissed her sleeve in gratitude for all she had done and Maria clung to her, sobbing out her love for Rafael who never had "eyes for any girl" and declaring

that if he died she would enter a convent. She couldn't bring herself to tell them the dreadful truth.

But, "If he dies I shall be a murderer," she told Betty bitterly. "I've always been so vain and frivolous. Now when I want to take life seriously and do things for other people, as you do, I only make a mess of it, and bring dreadful trouble where I wanted most to help. I shall never, never try to do anything more. I wish I were ——"

"No, you don't," Betty assured her hastily. "Just because you did the best you could for those boys and this silly one had his head full of sentimental nonsense doesn't make you responsible. It's a dreadful thing, of course, but I'm sure he'll get well. Didn't the doctor think so?"

The doctor hadn't said.

"Then I'll leave word for him to telephone you here of any change either way," Betty decreed. "Mrs. Post is going to make German Christmas cakes this morning for the girls. She wanted me to help her, but I've got to go to the Tally-ho before chapel and then to the office, so you simply must help

instead. I suppose you haven't had any breakfast, have you now?"

Eleanor didn't want any.

"Of course you do. I'll send some up by a maid, and Mrs. Post will tell you when she's ready to begin on the cakes. Remember, the telephone messages will come here, so you must stay till I get back."

Six times that morning Betty left an accommodating friend in charge of her office, and in the short intervals between clients rushed over to inquire for the cakes, Eleanor, and Rafael. At noon she snatched a moment before luncheon to tell Mr. Thayer all about it—Eleanor had declared she never could do that—so that he could explain what was necessary to the authorities and avoid a futile search for non-existent Black Hand plots and family feuds. Mr. Thayer had seen Rafael and the doctor, and the doctor had been very encouraging. Betty flew back to assure Eleanor that he had not been deceiving her—that he had said the very same things to Mr. Thayer—and to beg her assistance that afternoon at the Tally-ho workshop. For Madeline had come out of her dramatic eclipse

long enough to design some Christmas dinner-cards, and there was a small fortune in them if only they could be put on sale in time. Secretly Eleanor thought that Betty had grown just a little bit selfish and very commercial since they had left college; but she could not well refuse, after the dainty breakfast on a tray and all the calls and the arranging with Mr. Thayer, to help with the Christmas dinner-cards.

Next day Rafael was worse. The doctor looked serious and suggested a night-nurse and a consultation. At noon Eleanor declared that the air of the little workshop stifled her, and Betty gave up office-hours—an unheard-of proceeding—to go for a long tramp, during which she planned all sorts of delightful things that Eleanor should do for Rafael when he got well.

The next day the boy was better, the day after that worse. But at the end of a nerve-racking week of alternating hopes and fears the doctor pronounced him out of danger. That very afternoon Jim telegraphed that he was sick with a cold and needed Eleanor. Jim had always hated coddling, Eleanor com-

mented wonderingly, and failed to notice Betty's dimple flashing out in a tiny smile that was at once sternly suppressed. For Jim had written her that he only hoped he could preserve "the faded shadow of a suspicion of a snuffle" until Eleanor's arrival. "After that," he concluded, "I count on my new bull pup, suitors galore, and the diversions of little old New York to blow away any remaining relics of melancholy. When the poor little chap is well enough dad and I will see him through the best trade-school we can find and give him every chance that's coming to him. Adoring some girls is a thing no fellow can or ought to help."

## CHAPTER XIII

### GENIUS ARRIVES

BETTY WALES was going home for Christmas—a “ploshkin” income puts life on such a comfortable financial basis! And between Christmas and New Year’s Babe was going to be married. That meant coming half-way back to Harding for the wedding; and it made easier Betty’s sad decision that since the stocking factory was willing to postpone its Christmas party till New Year’s, and since most of the Morton Hall girls would spend their vacations in town, and certainly be very forlorn indeed unless somebody looked after them, it was the duty of Miss B. Wales, Secretary, to come back early and lend a hand.

Betty breathed a deep sigh of relief when she had seen Eleanor off to New York, in the company of Madeline Ayres, who had finished her play and now flatly refused to delay the putting on of the final touches in New York for the interests of the Tally-ho’s gift-shop department.

"Why, my dear girls," she declared tragically, "I'm not half through yet. I've got to see every success on Broadway now, to get into touch with the season's fads. Then I shall 'supe' a few times, to catch the right feeling for one or two bare spots in my first act. Finally, I shall probably hate my play so that I'll tear it up and take the next boat for Naples, to be consoled by my Bohemian family, who will laud me to the skies for tearing up a play because I considered it bad art."

"Oh, Madeline!" came in horror-struck chorus at this point.

"Well," Madeline admitted blandly, "I'm willing to confide to friends that at present my humble effort looks to me like the play of the year—and I'm fairly stage-wise already. Dick Blake used to advise all the aspiring dramatic critics he knew to take me along to their big first nights, because I can always tell by instinct what the audience is saying to itself. I'm a perfect mirror of public opinion. If I still believe in my play after I've been 'round a little I shall see Miss Dwight and her manager. After that——" Madeline



shrugged her shoulders, and confided irrelevantly to the resident B. C. A.'s, who had come down to see the travelers off, that she wanted a black velvet hat with a white feather.

"And I'm going to have it, what's more," she ended. "I wrote dad, and he just said, 'It's lucky you don't want two white feathers, now isn't it?' And he sent along a munificent check."

Which proved, Betty said, that genius is not incompatible with frivolous-mindedness.

Jim sniffled manfully on their arrival, and his carefully marshaled "features" diverted Eleanor beautifully, especially after she had been up to Harding once to see Rafael, who, after he began to mend, progressed with amazing rapidity on the road to recovery. Because she had dreaded seeing him, she was relieved to get the meeting over, and much more relieved to find the boy so completely changed. As soon as it could be managed he had been moved to a hospital, and the new atmosphere, supplemented by good care and kindness, had done wonders for him. Before he was well enough to leave, Mr. Thayer de-

clared, Rafael would be completely Americanized.

He greeted Eleanor with a frank smile above his big bandages.

"I awful silly boy," he said, holding out a thin hand to her. "I guess you want laugh at me. I guess you tink I know not how gran' you live in this country. Now I know. I know two, tree nurse-lady and many visitor-lady, looka like you. I like to live here always. I hope I get well awful slow."

But, when Eleanor had delivered Jim's message about Rafael's going, as soon as he was strong enough, to a fine trade-school in Philadelphia, he changed his mind.

"Den I hope I get well awful fast. Before I get old, I know how all de wheels in dis world go round, mebbe. I think you be mad at me, and now you do me dis great big splendor."

"Oh, no, I wasn't ever 'mad' at you," Eleanor explained, "only sorry you were so silly, and dreadfully frightened when you were so ill the first week."

Rafael shrugged his shoulders. "Good ting for me. I come here. I learn how to

be 'Merican man in two, tree weeks. I come here silly lil foreign boy. I look roun'. I listen hard. I see how you do here in your gran' country. And now," Rafael snuggled into his pillows with a beatific smile, "I find why all dose wheel go roun'. I maka fine machine, mebbe. I swear off carry a dagger. And I tank you alla my life."

So Eleanor could return to Jim, the bull pup, the suitors, and the diversions of New York, with the happy assurance that in the end Rafael's devotion to her might be the making of him, and at the least its untoward climax would do him more good than harm. Having nothing now to worry about, she devoted the journey back to New York to planning a ravishing new gown for Babe's wedding. It was to be yellow, because Dick Blake (who would not be at the wedding) liked yellow gowns on her best; and very plain, because Dick liked simple lines and no furbelows. Details might safely be left to Madame Celeste. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that Eleanor devoted the journey back to New York to thinking about Dick Blake.

Babe's wedding was to be a grand society function.

"To please John's father and my mother," Babe wrote to her friends of 19—; "John and I are resigned, because a wedding only lasts for one evening, and after that we can shut ourselves up in our regular castle of a house, with only the people we want, and everything you can think of in your wildest dreams to amuse ourselves with. So one little evening isn't much to sacrifice. Mother says we owe it to our social position. She doesn't know that we have decided not to have any social position. We're just going to have a good time and try to make some good times for other people. An impromptu wedding would have been lots more fun, but you must all come, just the same."

Babe's sister was to be maid of honor, Bob and Babbie, Betty and Roberta Lewis were to be bridesmaids, and the other "Merry Hearts" would sit together in a front pew, and be considered just as much in the wedding party as if they were bridesmaids also. Jasper J. Morton was coming up the night of the wedding in his private car. He had

meant to come the day before "to help you entertain Miss B. A. and her friends," he wrote Babe, but there were important directors' meetings to keep him at the last minute. He wrote Babe not to worry about him. "I shall charter a special train if necessary—and don't I always arrive on time as a matter of principle?"

But when Babe left the house for the church he had not appeared, and after they had kept people waiting and wondering half an hour, and Babe was so nervous that she declared she should cry in one more minute it was decided to go on without him.

The reception was half over when he appeared, looking very meek and sheepish. He kissed Babe on both cheeks, shook John's hand till it ached, and despatched Babbie to "find those reporter fellows and tell 'em I'm not smashed up anywhere between here and New York, and I don't withhold my blessing from the happy couple. Tell 'em I was accidentally detained, and if they want to know how say it was on a private matter that is none of their business."

"And add some characteristic remarks

about the ridiculous apes who try to run our railroads," put in John with a chuckle.

"No, sir," said Jasper J. Morton, with emphasis, "not this trip. Pretty nearly every mile was a record, and I've recommended that engineer to run the road's Lightning Limited at a big increase over his present pay. The reason I didn't get here was personal—purely personal."

Later in the evening he got Babe and John and Betty into a corner, and told them all about it. "Miss B. A.'s to blame, as usual," he began. "You see my train went out just ten minutes behind the Lightning Limited, with no stop till Albany and the track clear all the way west. I was hurrying through the station to get on, when I nearly ran down a pretty little woman who was crying so hard she didn't see me coming. She'd lost the Lightning Limited, and her husband was dying in a little place just beyond Albany where he'd gone on business and been taken suddenly sick. There was a slow train in an hour, but that would be too late, she said.

"Naturally I told her to come with me to Albany. And then of course I couldn't leave

her there to hunt up her connection alone, and have to waste time waiting, maybe. So I arranged for a stop at the town she was going to, and then," Jasper J. Morton flushed shamefacedly, "when nobody met her, we side-tracked our outfit and I drove up to the hotel with her. She was barely in time, the doctor said. They'd been married just a year to-day, she told me. I guess if ever you two are in a tight place you'll be thankful to anybody who misses his boy's wedding to help you out. But I wouldn't have those reporters out there know what a soft-hearted old auntie I'm getting to be, not for anything. Miss B. A., you'll be the ruin of me yet, with all your theories about looking out for the other fellow."

"We'll be married all over again if you'd like us to, Father Morton," Babe offered gallantly, although she had assured John after the ceremony that she wouldn't ever have promised to marry him if she had realized the queer feelings you have while you are doing it.

But Mr. Morton refused her generous offer. "I'm satisfied," he said, "as long as John's

got you for a wife and I've got you for a daughter. My seeing it done wouldn't have made any big difference to you ——"

"Oh, yes, it would," broke in Babe kindly.

"Not the difference it made to that poor little crying lady to see her husband," pursued Mr. Morton. Then he chuckled merrily as Babbie appeared, looking very angry and quite absurdly pretty in consequence. "Were those reporters inquisitive?" he demanded.

"They did think you stayed away on purpose," declared Babbie indignantly. "As if any one could possibly disapprove of Babe! I told them you were just as fond of her as John is. And now they're discussing what effect your being late will have on Wall Street. They said to tell you that, and to ask you please to come out and talk to them, if you didn't want the market to collapse tomorrow like a pricked balloon. They laughed right in my face when I said it was a 'private affair' that kept you."

"I'll settle them," said Jasper J. Morton, and went off muttering something about "those chimpanzees that run the newspapers."

Whereat John looked relieved. "First time



he's acted natural to-night," he said. "If he hadn't gone up in the air pretty soon, I should have telegraphed his doctor. But now we can start on our wedding trip feeling perfectly safe about him."

Madeline couldn't come to the wedding. She had sent her play to Miss Dwight's manager, and now she was exerting all her ingenuity to get a personal interview with Miss Dwight herself.

"Her present play isn't going well, and she's as cross as a bear," Madeline wrote Babe. "Dick Blake knows her—had dinner with her just before I came down. She said that night that she believed in her play, and if it failed she should lose all faith in American audiences, buy a lake in Maine and a river in Florida, and retire from the stage. Dick says she will never do that, but he thinks it's no use talking my play to her in her present mood. He got the manager of the Lyric Repertoire Theatre to say he'd read the manuscript, and now he's perfectly furious with me because I persist with Miss Dwight. 'Agatha or nobody' is my war-cry! If she'd only read my play or talk to me, one or the other,

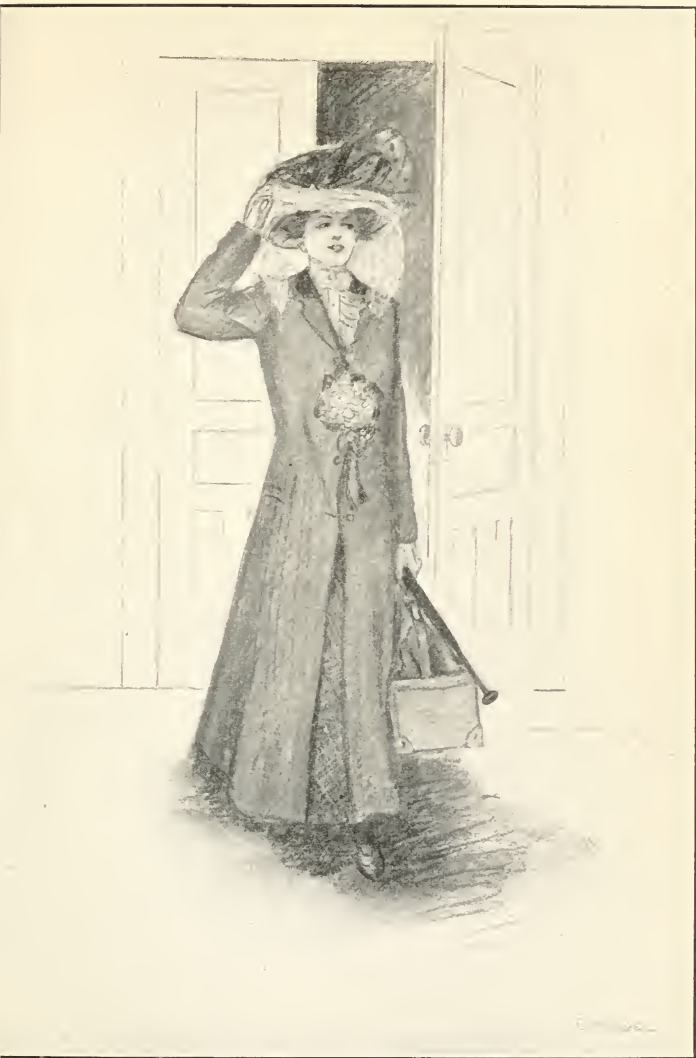
I know there wouldn't be any more trouble. That play fits her like a glove, and it will take—oh, how it will take!”

When college opened again Madeline was still on Miss Dwight's trail, but almost ready to give up and let the Lyric manager, or anybody else who wanted it, take her play. Miss Dwight's manager had made no sign. Miss Dwight herself, piqued by her first failure, had entrenched herself behind unassailable barriers.

“I've tried everything,” wrote Madeline despairingly. “I got ‘The Sentinel’ to send me to interview her, and she wouldn't let me in. The Enderbys gave a dinner for her; she accepted and then sent word she was ill. Dick Blake relented and tried to introduce the subject of his talented young friend, and she would hear none of me.

“To-night I'm playing my last card. If it doesn't take the trick, why, I've lost, that's all. Rumor says that her manager has had six hundred plays sent him this last week—of course he won't find mine under that pile.”

For two weeks thereafter the pen of the aspiring playwright was silent. Betty and



JUST AS THEY HAD GIVEN HER UP



Mary Brooks decided that she was busy getting her play out from under the pile of other manuscripts, in order to send it to the despised manager of the Lyric. So they were surprised and delighted when Betty received a rapturous, incoherent scrawl, announcing complete success.

"She took it. She's rehearsing it now. The part does fit her, just as I said it would. She's coming up with me soon to see Harding.

"With love from the happiest girl in New York, MAD.

"P. S.—Plan a B. C. A. tea-party for tomorrow. I can't wait any longer to tell you all about it."

The B. C. A.'s assembled joyously, and just as they had given her up Madeline appeared, trying hard to act offhand and unconcerned, and managing it about as badly as might have been expected of a young person whose first play was being rehearsed with much enthusiasm by Agatha Dwight, and advertised far and wide by her manager as the play of the year.

The B. C. A.'s plied her with tea, muffins,

and jam, which she despatched promptly, and with questions, which she totally ignored, giving them all sorts of irrelevant information about Eleanor's music, Jim's dog, and Dick's splendid serial, by a "dark horse" in fiction-writing, which was doing wonders for the subscription list and the standing of "The Quiver." When she had finished three cups of tea and uncounted muffins, she settled back in a corner of the Tally-ho stall with a sigh of complete satisfaction.

"Now," she said, "I'll tell you all about it. It's much too good a story to mix up with crumpets and tea, like ordinary conversation. And don't interrupt, or I shall be sorry I came."

Awestruck silence met this dire announcement, and Madeline began.

"I wrote you about the interview I couldn't get, the dinner Miss Dwight wouldn't come to, the time she snapped Dick off so short, and all that. There were other things of the same kind—a reception the Woman's College Club gave for her, when she swept in looking like a princess, made a funny, fascinating little speech, and swept out again. Well, I

was to have introduced her to people that afternoon, and I'd counted on making her notice me and so getting my chance. I didn't get it that way, but I made a discovery.

"I found that a girl who had a walking part in the first act of her play and another in the last, and who was down on the bills as Annette Weeks for one and Felicia Trench for the other, was a Harding girl named plain Mary Smith. That is, she didn't graduate, but was here a year or two just before our time. Well, I went to that ridiculous play every night for a week, until I knew every bit of the Weeks-Trench business as well as Mary Smith herself. Then I waited for her at the stage door after a matinée, took her for tea somewhere, told her what I wanted, and begged her to play sick and let me do her part for a week or two.

"At first she laughed at me—said she might play sick all she could, but I wouldn't get the place. Besides, I was taller than she. What would I do for clothes? Before I could get the dresses made the play would be done for. For a minute I was stumped by that—I hadn't thought of clothes. Then I remembered

Eleanor's super-elegant wardrobe, and I knew she'd lend me some things under the circumstances. And I saw that Mary Smith was in the same mood as Miss Dwight,—discouraged over the play and worried at being left in mid-season without a part. So I talked hard, all about my play and the honor of Harding, and the college girl's elevating the stage by writing as well as by acting. And then I put it to her: 'You've got nothing much to lose, and I've got everything to gain. Can you act?' She shook her head. 'Miss Dwight took me on because she wants to encourage nice girls to go on the stage. There's a walking part in nearly every play, so she's kept me.' 'There's a walking part in my play,' I told her, 'and if this one isn't good for over two weeks you can rest and go to the theatre and save your dresses for another part.' 'All right,' she said. 'Of course you get the salary,' I said. 'Give me a pencil,' she said, 'and I'll write you the reference.' That's how I landed in Agatha Dwight's company, exactly two weeks ago to-night."

Madeline paused dramatically. Mary Brooks opened her mouth to ask a ques-



tion, and closed it again hastily, gasping like a fish. Helen Chase Adams got as far as the initial "burble" of "but," and stopped spasmodically. Madeline had impressed them all with the importance of obeying the rules of the occasion.

"That," she said, looking around the circle with a pleased smile, "is chapter one. The next thing was to get Her Highness to notice me. The first night, as she swept by me on her way to her car, she inquired for the girl I'd ousted, and said it was refreshing to find an understudy who didn't need breaking in. After that she never looked at me for four days except in the scenes, and then with a vacant sort of a stare and a stage smile. But the next night she turned giddy in the first act, and I managed to improvise a parlor story that fitted well enough into the scene while she snuffed smelling-salts and pulled herself together, so that the audience never guessed that anything was wrong. She looked awfully angry—at herself or me, I couldn't tell which. But the manager patted me on the back, and perhaps because he told her to she sent for me to come to her in the

long intermission. And I went, of course, and she asked me all about myself, and she liked my answers. So I plunged right in. The manager spent the night finding my play for her, and she spent the morning reading it and the afternoon talking to me about it, and the next day they began rehearsals—with the walking lady back in her part. I explained about her, and Miss Dwight thought it was a lovely story. She's got a real Harding sense of humor; and she's coming up here before long to see the place. That's all." Madeline leaned forward to reach for the muffin plate, and perceiving it to be empty hastily leaned back again.

Mary summoned Nora. "More muffins, please," she ordered, "and don't look so reproachful, Nora, please, over our appetites. Miss Madeline has been too busy lately proving that she's a genius to take time to eat. Now she's making up for it."

"Oh, and is that what's to pay?" said Nora, smiling comprehensively at the B. C. A.'s. "Provin' anything is hard worrk. I could never prove me sums at school. That's because they was generally wrong. It's awful

hard to prove what ain't so, ain't it now, Miss Madeline?" And Nora departed amiably for more muffins, ignoring the bursts of laughter that followed her. Nora had long since ceased to attach any significance to the laughter of the Harding girls. They laughed just as other people breathed. It was as unaccountable as the enormous number of muffins they consumed.

They were still laughing when Nora came back with Mary's order. They sent her off again for hot tea, and they drank Madeline's health in it, and Miss Dwight's, and the health of the Walking Lady who had helped Madeline to play out her trump card. They congratulated Madeline riotously, they made wonderful plans for Miss Dwight's visit to Harding, and others for seeing the first night of the play.

"We are at last justified in the eyes of the wide, wide world," declaimed Mary pompously. "We've been called the cleverest crowd in college, and now we've shown 'em. A well-kept husband like mine and a well-kept tea-room like Betty's are nice little features, but a play for Agatha Dwight is the

real thing. And the moral of that is : Look out for a genius, and the grand-stand play will look out for itself."

"And the moral of that," said little Helen Chase Adams primly, "is that it's time for faculty wives to dress for dinner."

"Also campus faculty," added Rachel hastily, and the most exciting B. C. A. tea-drinking of the season reluctantly dispersed.

## CHAPTER XIV

### AS A BULL PUP ORDAINS

HARDING COLLEGE was almost as excited over Madeline's play as the B. C. A.'s had been.

"Why, she wrote it in this very town," wide-eyed freshmen told each other.

"In this very room, maybe," diners at the Tally-ho added wonderingly.

"And she's only been out of college a year and a half."

"I guess our little Catherine will be heard from some day. Miss Ayres was the leading literary light of her class, just like Cath. I can tell you these college reputations mean something!"

"Did you hear how she got Miss Dwight to read her play?"

"What's it about, anyway?"

"Nobody knows—it's a dead secret. But college girls come into it, I guess, because Miss Dwight is going to visit Miss Ayres up here—to study the atmosphere, I suppose."

"I'm going in for elocution this next semester. If I get a good part in the senior play, I shall seriously consider going on the stage. Miss Dwight encourages college girls to do that. She thinks it offers a splendid field for educated women."

So was Harding College once more stage-struck, and Miss Dick's school as well. The Smallest Sister carried the great news there, and Frisky Fenton and her crowd bought Miss Dwight's pictures to adorn their dressers, and bribed the Smallest Sister, by the subtlest arts known to the big girl for beguiling the little one, to arrange a dinner-party for them at the Tally-ho on the night when Miss Dwight was to be there.

"You promised me a spread down there long ago," the Smallest Sister urged Betty.

"But I shall be so very busy that night," Betty objected. "Couldn't you come by yourself then, and have the party later?"

"But the others want to see her just as much as I do," Dorothy urged. "Frisky said she would about die of joy if she could see her, and so will all of them. And they've been awfully nice to me."

"All right," said Betty resignedly, "only I can't sit with you and you'll probably have a very poor dinner, because the tea-shop will be so crowded."

After all, one table more or less wouldn't matter, she reflected, on a night when practically every Harding girl would try to get her dinner at the Tally-ho.

Miss Dwight off the stage was a demure little lady with wonderful eyes, a smile that made people who saw it smile back in spite of themselves, and a voice that thrilled one no matter what its owner said. Her hair was gray, and so were her clothes, when they weren't black. She hated attention, shrank forlornly behind Madeline when the girls stared or sang to her, and only came to dinner at the Tally-ho because Madeline had assured her that it was, at the dinner-hour, the very soul and centre of the college world.

Having come, she exclaimed rapturously at all the "features," and then, perceiving that she was the chief of them, she hid in the remotest corner of Jack o' Hearts' stall, with Madeline on one side for protection and Mary and Betty to talk to across the way. Her big

hat drooped so far over her face that girls who rudely looked in as they went by the stall saw nothing but the soft curve of her cheek and her chin cleft by a big dimple—unless it happened to be a moment when she had boldly resolved to look out upon these “wonderful, frightful collegians.” Then she lifted the brim of the absurd hat with a fascinating gesture, and smiled her clear, child-like smile at the curious passers-by.

Dorothy’s table was the one nearest to Jack o’ Hearts’ stall, so that she and her friends came in for a generous share of Miss Dwight’s smiling inspection of her surroundings. But that wasn’t enough for Frisky Fenton.

“I’ve just got to speak to her,” she declared. “If she’s as retiring as you say, Dot, I’m afraid we shan’t get any chance later. I think I’ll go over there now.”

“But I’m afraid Betty wouldn’t like it,” objected the Smallest Sister anxiously.

“Well, if she doesn’t, she won’t blame you,” retorted Frisky, “and I shan’t mind being in hot water with her, as long as I get a chance to talk to Miss Dwight. I can make it all right with your sister afterward, I’m sure.”



"Please don't go, Frisky," begged Dorothy, sending imploring glances across at Betty, who was perfectly oblivious of the Smallest Sister's efforts. "It's not polite to go where you're not invited. Betty said she'd have us meet Miss Dwight later if she could."

Frisky gave an irritating little laugh. "You don't understand about such things, dear. I'm not a child, to be sent for with desert." And with that she jumped up and crossed quickly to Jack o' Hearts' stall, where she appeared, a very pretty, demure, totally inexplicable vision, before the astonished party of diners. She nodded to Betty and Madeline, smiled at Mary, and curtsied, with dropped eyes, before Miss Dwight.

"Excuse me, Miss Dwight," she said sweetly, "but do you think I'd be a success on the stage? I'm crazy about it."

Miss Dwight laughed heartily at the absurd question. "Sit down, my dear," she said, not seeming to mind the unwarranted invasion of her privacy. "Are you one of these astonishing Harding girls?"

"No, I'm only at school," explained Frisky calmly, "but I'm as old as some college girls.

And anyway, isn't it better to begin acting when you're very young?"

Miss Dwight stared at her, a sombre shadow in her great dark eyes. "You're far too pretty to begin young," she said. "Some day, if you really want it, and your mother is willing——"

"I've only a stepmother," put in Frisky airily, "so I needn't consider that."

Miss Dwight looked at her again. "It's a hard life, my dear—a long pull, and very little besides more hard work for you if you win, and if you never do make good—and most of us don't——"

"Oh, please don't discourage me," Frisky broke in impulsively. "It's the one thing in life for me."

"Wait till you have some idea about life before you say that," Miss Dwight advised her rather sharply. "Make friends with your stepmother, to begin with. If you can do that now, perhaps some day you can make friends with an audience. Go back to school and study hard. Read the great plays and the great poems. And in five years, if you're still stage-struck, come to me—and I'll give

you some more good advice. Good-bye, my dear." She held out her hand with a definite gesture of dismissal that even Frisky could not ignore.

"Good-bye, and thank you," said the girl, "but five years is an awfully long time to wait, Miss Dwight. You may see me sooner."

With which parting shot, Frisky returned to her horrified friends more stage-struck than ever, and more confident of her ability to manage any situation to her liking. Her vanity would have received a severe shock if she had heard Miss Dwight call her a silly child, Madeline emphasize the fact that Frisky wasn't a college girl, or a type of even the shallowest variety, and Betty confide to Mary Brooks Hinsdale that she was thoroughly ashamed of the Smallest Sister's new chum.

The next morning Frisky sent Miss Dwight a bunch of violets and a gushing note, which her divinity refused to read because "the handwriting made her nervous." But there was also a note from Helena Mason, enclosing a little verse which she asked permission to print in the next "Argus." Miss Dwight laughed and cried over it, declared it was

the best thing that had ever been written about her, and made Madeline take her at once to see the author, who gushed, in conversation, as badly as Frisky had on paper, and seemed to have the vaguest possible ideas about Miss Dwight's genius, which she had described so aptly in her poetical mood.

"All literary people are bores but you, my dear," Miss Dwight declared, hurrying Madeline away. "I discovered that years ago, but I'm always forgetting it again. If anybody else sends me a poem, please remind me to shun her. Time in Harding is too precious to be wasted."

Miss Dwight could stay away from New York only two days—"two sweet, stolen days," she called them. Then she hurried back to the rehearsals, leaving Madeline in Betty's charge.

"She's done all that she can for her play now," she explained, "and she'd far better stay here. She might make us nervous, and she'd certainly make herself miserable. Rehearsals are such contrary things. They've gone so abominably up to now that I'm absolutely sure the play will be a hit."

The nature of the hit was still a mystery. Madeline, Miss Dwight, and her manager were all stubbornly dumb. The title wasn't even put on the bill-boards until a week before the opening night, and then it might mean anything—"Her Choice."

Nearly all the B. C. A.'s were going down to see the first performance, but the one who was most excited at the prospect, next to Madeline, was undoubtedly Eleanor Watson. Her gowns had figured in Madeline's "walking part," but that wasn't the chief reason for her interest in the play. The great thing was that Richard Blake was giving a box party and a supper, and he had asked her and Jim to come. Dick had almost never taken her anywhere, and this winter he had been too busy even to come often to call. Yet Madeline seemed to see a good deal of him.

"He doesn't care for me. Why should he?" Eleanor had reflected sadly. "He likes Madeline because she's clever about the same sort of things that he is interested in. And yet when he does come to see me, he looks and acts as if——"

And then Dick had telephoned about the

box party. "It's almost never that I can ask you to anything you really care about," he had said, "so do say you'll come this time."

And when Eleanor had accepted, declaring that she always enjoyed doing things with him, he had taken her challenge. "Then I shall ask a pretty girl for your brother and two dull pairs of devoted people who won't bother us. Remember it's to be our very own party—only I can't come for you because 'The Quiver' goes to press that night, and I shall have a form to 'O. K.' between seven and eight."

Eleanor decided to wear her new yellow dress. At noon a huge bunch of violets arrived with Dick's card. At three Jim sent a messenger for his evening clothes. He wouldn't be able to get home to dinner. He might come for Eleanor at quarter to eight; if not, he would send a cab. Eleanor went across the street very early to the hotel where they took their dinners, and afterward slipped out of her street clothes and into a kimono, and curled up on the couch by the sitting-room fire to rest until it was time to dress for the evening. By and by she stretched

luxuriously, sat up, and without turning on a light went down the hall to her room. As she felt for the electric switch a low angry growl sounded from within. It was Peter Pan, Jim's new bulldog. He was feeling neglected, probably. Jim took him for a walk or romped with him indoors nearly every evening.

"Why, Peter!" Eleanor called persuasively. "Poor old Peter Pan! Were you lonely and bored and very cross?"

Another growl, and the noise of Peter's claws digging into the matting, as he scrambled to his feet. Eleanor turned on the light hastily, but Peter, unpropitiated and growling angrily, came forward a step or two and stood defiantly, ready to resist any encroachment on his domain.

"Why, Peter, you silly dog," coaxed Eleanor. "Don't you know me? Did you think I was a burglar coming in the dark to rob your dear master? Well, I'm not. Come here, Peter, good dog!"

Generally Peter would have come pattering across the floor, eager to lick Eleanor's hand. To-night he only growled again and showed

his teeth. Eleanor had had very little experience with dogs, and she was horribly frightened at Peter's extraordinary behavior. She remembered that when she came down to New York and was introduced to the apartment and to the room that Jim had moved out of because it was the largest and pleasantest he had to offer her, Jim had warned her to "go slow" with Peter Pan.

"He seems to have a little prejudice against strangers, especially ladies," Jim had said. "He snapped pretty hard at the janitor's wife one day when she was making my bed. She won't come in now unless he's out or chained. Don't try to pet him if he acts cross. He may resent your moving into my special quarters."

But Peter Pan had never acted cross or regarded Eleanor as an interloper, and Eleanor had petted him, taken him walking in the park, and quite forgotten Jim's warning until now.

"Peter," began Eleanor desperately again, "please stop growling. I've got to dress, and to do that I've got to come in where you are and go right past you to my dressing-room.



Now be a good dog and cheer up." Peter Pan paid no attention to this pathetic appeal. He growled again in a low but menacing key, and yawned, showing all his teeth once more in the process.

Eleanor shivered and retreated a step or two so that she could see the clock in the sitting-room. Twenty minutes past seven; if Jim came for her, she could dress and arrive late, but if not — On a chair near the door of her room were the walking skirt and blouse she had taken off. Near by were her black pumps. She had changed her stockings to a pair of pale yellow silk ones, leaving those she had taken off in the dressing-room, with her yellow dress and evening cape. Unless Jim came, she must appear at Dick's party in yellow stockings, black shoes, a mussy linen blouse, and a blue serge street-suit, or she must pass that growling dog twice in order to get her evening things. She wouldn't be downed! There was a dog-whip in the hall; she would get that and armed with it make the fatal dash. Then she remembered Jim's warning. "He's a dandy dog, but a puppy's temper is always

uncertain. So go slow and don't get near him when he's low in his mind."

Visions of herself pinioned helplessly in Peter Pan's vise-like grip until Jim, frightened at her failure to appear at the theatre, should appear, perhaps after she had endured hours of agony, to rescue her, kept Eleanor from going after the dog-whip. Bulldogs did maim and even kill people. Even a yellow dress, chosen especially to suit Dick's fastidious taste, wasn't worth that risk. But if she went in her street suit they would all laugh at her and say that there wasn't any risk. Two big tears dropped from Eleanor's eyes and rolled down her cheeks. She brushed them away scornfully, and crooning soft speeches to Peter Pan reached for the black pumps, the mussy blouse, and the walking skirt. Having secured them, she slammed the door upon the hateful dog, locked it, and dressed before the tiny mirror over the mantelpiece. Her tricorne hat and her coat were in the hall, but Dick's violets were in the dressing-room. Eleanor almost wept again as she thought of them. If only Jim came for her! But he didn't—he sent

a puffing taxi, whose driver stared curiously at her yellow stockings as he held open the door for her.

Everybody in the theatre lobby seemed to be staring. Eleanor's face flushed as she hurried to Dick's box. As she pulled back the curtain Dick jumped to meet her—and he stared at her stockings. The dull devoted ladies and the pretty girl for Jim were in very elaborate evening gowns—and they stared at her stockings, then at her mussy shirt-waist, and her plain little hat.

"Introduce me quick," pleaded Eleanor softly to Dick, who was trying to take her coat, "and then I can explain my clothes. No, I can't take off my coat. It's all the fault of that horrid, hateful Peter Pan."

Dick smiled at her blandly. "You look just as lovely as usual. In fact I like you best of all in plain dark things. Didn't some violets come?"

"They were in the dressing-room too, behind that miserable dog. If Jim ever comes—I must sit somewhere back in a corner."

"You must sit there with me beside you." Dick pointed to a chair in the front of the box.

"Don't you really mind?" demanded Eleanor. "Of course the stockings are the worst, and they won't show ——"

"I asked *you* to come to our very own party," Dick told her, "not your clothes. I've got plenty of clothes here already. Come and meet them, and tell them about the horrid Peter Pan. Did he chew up your entire wardrobe while you were out?"

It was a very funny story when once you were free to see it that way. The dull devoted couples got quite hysterical over it. Jim, when he came, was almost as bad, though he assured his sister soberly that she had done very well to "play safe" when Peter Pan was low in his mind.

"Most girls think all a man cares for is clothes," said Dick, as the orchestra played with lowered lights waiting for the first curtain.

"And most men think a girl cares only for flowers and candy and suppers."

"Before the wedding—and clothes and servants and all the luxuries she's used to afterward," added Dick a little bitterly.

"Whereas," Eleanor took him up, "if a

girl loves a man, she is willing to do without all but the plainest, simplest necessities. What she wants is a chance to help him, to be with him through thick and thin, to watch him make good, and to feel that she has a little bit of a share in the fine things he's doing and going to do."

She never could have said it if the lights had been on. She even flushed in the dark as she saw Dick lean forward to look into her eyes.

"Do you mean," he asked eagerly, "that you'd feel that way yourself?"

"I mean that any and every nice girl feels that way."

Just then the curtain went up, but for all Dick's interest in Madeline's play, his hand was crushing one of Eleanor's, and his heart was pounding so hard that the first act was half over before he had gathered his wits to know what it was all about.

The minute the curtain rang down, Dick turned to Eleanor. "In that case," he said under cover of the applause, "you've got to promise to marry me now. I can give you a good deal besides love and a chance to help,

but I've waited almost two years without daring to say a word, and I've been frightened to death for fear I should lose you to some fellow who could speak sooner."

"You needn't have worried," Eleanor told him, "because I was waiting too. But I consider that you've wasted two whole years for me out of my life. You'll have that to make up for, monsieur. Can you do it?"

"I can only try," said Dick very soberly.

The play was a triumph for Miss Dwight and for the author. That young person was sitting alone in the last row of the peanut gallery. Occasionally she pinched herself to make sure that she was awake, and just before the final curtain fell she crept softly out and went home by herself in a jolting, jangling Broadway car. There Dick and Eleanor found her rocking by the fire, the inevitable black kitten in her lap.

"Come to supper," Dick said. "You promised, and the taxi waits."

Madeline smiled dreamily up at them and patted the kitten. "Yes, Dick, I'll come to supper as long as I needn't dress up for it. What's the matter, Eleanor?"

"I want to know how you knew," demanded Eleanor eagerly. "How you guessed exactly how I've felt all these years about—about everything and—and Dick."

Madeline smiled. "If every woman in the audience wants to know that," she said, "the play goes. The shop-girl next me in the gallery wants to know, and Miss Dwight, and now you—— Excuse me, Eleanor, but where did you get those stockings?"

## CHAPTER XV

### A GAME OF HIDE-AND-SEEK—WITH “FEATURES”

BABE seized upon Eleanor's engagement as the best possible excuse for a week-end party.

“Living in a castle is rather a fright,” she confided to Betty. “John doesn't mind it, because he's always lived in a near-castle. I get lost. I'm afraid of the butler. The English housekeeper drops her aitches so fast that I can't tell what she wants to ask me. I forget the names of my horses. And when John is in town I haven't anybody to play with.”

“Seems to me you're not a very enthusiastic newly-wed,” Betty told her laughingly.

“Oh, yes, I am,” Babe declared very earnestly. “I love John, and I love Father Morton, and I love my house. Only I rattle around in it like a pea in a band-box. While I'm growing up to fit my surroundings I've got to have the assistance of all my friends. Will you come to my party, Betty? I'm



going to ask Father Morton, because he knows Mr. Blake, and besides he missed all the fun of the wedding."

So Betty, resolving to "'tend up" to business strictly for the rest of the year, took another week-end off to celebrate the engagement, see Babe's gorgeous mansion, and help make up to Mr. Morton for losing the wedding—all on her account, as he persisted in saying.

Babe's house, which had been Mr. Morton's wedding gift to her, was up on the Hudson, in a suburb so discreetly removed from the noise and dust of the railroad that nobody lived there except "carriage people." The wide roads wound in sweeping curves along the river, between lilac hedges, now capped with snow. In front, Babe's territory sloped through great gardens to the water; behind she had a real wood of her own. Inside the house the stately rooms were crowded with expensive furniture and beautiful bric-à-brac. Mr. Morton had taken Babe shopping and bought everything she had as much as stopped to look at. A famous decorator had been sent up to arrange the house and fill in the gaps. There was a fireplace taken bodily

from a Florentine palace, a Rembrandt that had once graced a royal gallery, a rug that men had spent their whole lives in weaving.

"I shall never know what we've got," sighed Babe, as she led the way through her domain. "Father Morton loves to surprise people. He says I haven't discovered half the special features that he's put in just to amuse me."

"If I were you I should feel like a princess in a fairy tale," sighed little Helen Adams, who had never in her life imagined anything half so splendid.

"I don't," said Babe stoutly. "Princesses have to wear long velvet dresses and look sweet all the time. Just as soon as I dare, I'm going to get rid of at least half the servants, so I can roll up my sleeves and go down to the kitchen. I learned to make bread at cooking-school before I was married, and it was a picnic." Babe paused and gazed joyously at her guests. "I've thought what would be a picnic to do right on this very afternoon, before you've even seen the rest of the house. To play hide-and-go-seek."

"Babe," began Mary Brooks sternly,

"you're still the Perfect Infant. Do you think it befits married ladies like you and me to indulge in children's games?"

Babe answered by running down the long hall, pulling the reluctant Mary after her.

"John," she cried when they reached the little library that John had seized upon for his den and in which he was now entertaining the masculine portion of the house party, "John, we're going to play hide-and-seek all over the house. Isn't that a grand idea?"

"Great," agreed the devoted John.

"Then come along, everybody," ordered Babe. "Will you play too, Father Morton?"

"Of course I will," said Jasper J. Morton testily. "One of the things this house is intended for is a good game of hide-and-seek. I didn't forget that you were a little tomboy, child. I didn't expect you to grow up all at once just because you'd promised to love and obey my boy John." Jasper J. Morton paused to chuckle. "Some of the best features of this house are still undiscovered. Maybe they'll come out in the course of this game."

Babe hugged him rapturously. "We dis-

covered the hidden bowling-alley last week," she said. "You were a duck to put in so many surprises right under my very nose, when I thought I was picking out everything and doing all the planning myself."

Mr. Morton laughed gleefully. "You like my surprises, do you? Independently of their being surprises, I mean. When young people build a house they never think of the most important things. For instance, there's no reason, just because you're going to have a new house, why you shouldn't keep to some of the good old ways. Most new houses are no earthly good for little tomboys to play in. Do you hear that, Watson? Too bad I got this place started before I met you. You'd have learned a lot of things about your business if you'd built this house for me."

"I don't doubt that, sir," said Jim dutifully.

"Keep your eyes open this afternoon," Mr. Morton advised him mysteriously. "There are features in this house that the head of your firm wouldn't be capable of inventing. Architects are like sheep—they follow the last fashions. Now when I've been

abroad, I've studied buildings over there. When I see a good thing in some old house in a little moss-grown town like Harding, I remember it. I also study character. Just as Morton Hall is adapted to Miss B. A. and her protégées, so this place is adapted to John and this little tomboy. I exercise prevision when I build. Why, I foresaw this very game of hide-and-seek, so to speak. Just give a little study to the habits and tastes of your clients, my boy, and you'll make a name for yourself. That's the way to build; study character and exercise foresight."

"Thank you, sir," said Jim respectfully.

"Eny, meeny, miny, mo," began Babe hastily, having had quite enough of architectural theories. The lot of being "it" first fell upon her, and John's den was chosen as goal.

"Remember," Babe told them, "you can go anywhere except to the kitchen. I shouldn't dare to chase you there. Open any door that you see ——"

"Particularly any door you don't quite see," put in Jasper J. Morton mysteriously.

"It's too early for skeletons," laughed

John, "so you needn't be afraid of the closets."

"I shall count my hundred awfully fast," announced Babe, suiting the action to the words with a promptness that sent her guests scuttling for hiding-places.

The first person to be caught was Helen Adams, who confessed that she hadn't dared to go into any rooms but the down-stairs ones that were obviously meant for guests; and nobody had gone far or had happened upon any very difficult hiding-places. But the next time, led by Babe, the party ranged far afield, and it took so long to find them all that a ten-minute limit was arranged; after ten minutes' hunting those who were not found could "come in free." Nobody was surprised that Dick and Eleanor should forget this privilege at the end of a round, but when Betty had twice failed to appear Babe declared that she must have found one of Father Morton's real hiding-places, and the whole party started off in search of her. Up-stairs and down again they went, opening closets, hunting in chests, under beds, behind portières. Babe declared that she was at last learning the way around

her domain, and discovering any number of extra cupboards and closets; but neither she nor anybody else discovered Betty.

At four the butler caught his flyaway little mistress long enough to announce to her that tea was served in the yellow drawing-room.

"We shall have to go," she said sadly, rounding up her guests. "I shouldn't dare to tell him that we were too busy playing hide-and-seek. Besides, I'm hungry, for one. Betty will hear us all in there together, and know we've given her up and come out. Let's all shout together 'We give up'!"

So the big house echoed to their chanted "We give up," and then they repaired to the yellow drawing-room, where Babe sat on a carved oak throne and poured tea, from a wonderful silver pot wreathed with dragons, into cups so fragile that you could have crushed them as you would a flower. There were muffins and crackers and sweet sandwiches and nuts and ginger, all of which tasted very good to the hungry "hiders." And in the midst of tea there was an excitement, in the shape of a telegram summoning

Mr. Morton, Senior, to a conference on board a train that would reach this station in less than ten minutes.

"Have to miss dinner, I suppose, but I'll be back to-night sure," he grumbled as Babe pulled on his coat, John found his gloves and hat, a valet packed his bag, in case of emergency, and the butler rang for the chauffeur to bring around a limousine. "Where's Miss B. A.?" he demanded as the car appeared. "Hasn't she come out yet? Well, if the rest of you have any gumption, you'll take her dare and find her. I say, Watson, you know how a house is built, and you know that Miss B. A. is worth finding ——"

"Train's whistling, dad," broke in John.

"Then the automobile speed limit has got to go smash again," said Jasper J. Morton resignedly, jumping into the car. "Find her, Watson. She's worth it," he called back, waving his hand spasmodically as the car shot round a curve and out of sight.

Most of the young people had gathered in the hall to see Mr. Morton off, but little Helen Adams, feeling rather shy and out-of-place, had crept back into the drawing-room,



which, lighted only by the fire and the candles on the tea-table, seemed so rich and dim and lovely that to be alone in it made her give a long deep sigh of joy and satisfaction and wonder at the idea of plain little Helen Chase Adams spending the week-end with a gay house party in such a splendid place.

She had just seated herself in a great cushioned chair by the fire to enjoy it all—Helen was one of the people who must be alone to drink their pleasures to the full—when she heard a little tap on the wall so close to her that it made her jump. But in a minute she settled back again comfortably. “Mice or a bit of loose plaster,” she decided. But an instant later there came a little low moan—an eery sort of muffled cry—and this time she screamed and jumped quite out of her chair. The door had just been shut after Mr. Morton, and Babe came running in, followed by all the others, and at a respectful distance by the stately butler, to ask what the matter was.

“Why, I don’t know,” said Helen anxiously. “Something or somebody cried out in

another room, and it sounded so near me and so queer, some way, that I screamed. I'm sorry I frightened all the rest of you too."

"Mamie the parlor-maid always gives a heartrending shriek when she breaks one of my favorite wedding presents," suggested Babe mournfully. "It was probably Mamie—only why should she be dusting and breaking things at this time of day?"

"Why indeed?" demanded Madeline scornfully. "Did it sound like a pathetic parlor-maid, Helen?"

"It didn't sound like any real person," Helen explained slowly. "It was muffled and far away and choked—like a—why, like a ghost!"

"Exactly," cried Madeline triumphantly. "Babe, don't you see what's happened? One of the highly advertised features of your domicile has come to light. Your respected father-in-law, realizing that no castle is complete without a ghost—he remembered Babie's, probably—built in one, warranted to appear to persons sitting alone in the firelight. And you try to pretend it's only a parlor-maid in distress."

"I hope it wasn't Betty in distress," put in Eleanor Watson.

"I'm really afraid she's locked in somewhere," said Babe anxiously. "Didn't a girl in an old story once hide in a chest in a game like this, and get faint and finally smother? Did the noise sound as if it could have been Betty, Helen?"

Helen confessed that it might have been almost anything.

"Thomas," Babe turned to the butler, "will you please take two of the servants and hunt in the cellar for Miss Wales? I'll take the up-stairs rooms, and John, you and the men hunt down here, and then go up to the attic. Open all the chests and cupboards. Oh, dear, I wish this house wasn't so big!"

Search "up-stairs, down-stairs, and in my lady's chamber" revealed no Betty. Eleanor, passing the door of the yellow drawing-room, thought she heard another cry, but when, reinforced by Dick and John, she went in to listen for its repetition, all was still. Nobody was under the furniture or in the next room, and the open fires in both rooms made the chimney an impossible retreat. But it was

from near the chimney that Eleanor thought the cry had come, and Helen had been sitting near the fire when it sounded in her ear.

"She must be in one of the secret chambers that Mr. Morton broadly hinted at," said Madeline finally. "But why, if she went in, doesn't she come out?"

Jim Watson had been frenziedly active in searching chests and cupboards. Now he was knocking on the wall near the fireplace and running back and forth between the two adjoining rooms, taking note of the position and thickness of the partitions.

"There's a passage between these rooms," he announced at last, "and a shaft or a staircase or something running up in this corner. See—there's a square taken out. But how you get in, I can't see."

"Oh, do try to see," begged Babe eagerly. "You know Father Morton said you could learn a lot from this house. I wish we knew for sure that she was in there and"—Babe choked a little—"all right."

"Knock hard on the wall," suggested Mr. Blake. "Maybe she'll hear that better than our talking, and answer it."

Regardless of priceless wall-hangings Babe seized a pair of brass tongs and pounded on the wall as if she meant to break it down.

"Go easy, Babe," advised Madeline, but Babe only pounded harder.

"If she's in there we want to know that she's all right," declared Babe hotly. "And then we've got to get her out if we have to batter down this wall to do it."

"How will you know Betty's knock from a ghost's?" demanded Madeline flippantly, but no one paid any attention to her because just at that moment a faint knock did sound on the other side of the wall.

Babe gave a little cry of relief. "Then she isn't suffocated! That story has just been haunting me. Now, Mr. Watson, you know how a house is built, to quote Father Morton. You must find how to get to her."

Jim looked as if he wanted to use the tongs as a battering-ram, but he refrained. "I'll try up-stairs," he said. "Maybe the entrance is there."

"I'll show you which rooms are over these," volunteered John.

But there was no opening up-stairs.

It was Helen Adams who made the next suggestion. "If a stairway goes up, mightn't it go down too? Perhaps you can enter from the cellar."

And sure enough half-way down the cellar stairs Jim discovered a little door.

"May be a snap lock that's kept her in," he muttered irritably. "Hold it open, Eleanor. Here, Thomas, let's have your electric bug. Hello, Betty! Betty, I say!"

"Here I am," called a faint, frightened little voice from up above. "Here I am, but where I am I don't know, and I think I've sprained my ankle."

Ensconced on the couch in John's den Betty had her belated tea, while Babe rubbed the turned ankle vigorously, and the others stood around listening to the tale of ghostly adventures.

"I got in up-stairs," Betty explained, "through a sliding panel sort of thing that opens out of that curved part of the hall."

"Of course," Jim put in. "We looked on the other side."

"I shut the door so no one else would find it," explained Betty, "and of course it was





EMIGEL

THE OTHERS STOOD AROUND LISTENING





THE OTHERS STOOD AROUND LISTENING

pretty dark, though there is a little high window opening into the hall to light the first part of the passage."

"I know—looks like a ventilator," interrupted Jim again.

"But when I came to the flight of stairs, I didn't see them," Betty took up her story, "and I wasn't expecting stairs, so I fell most of the way down and landed with one foot under me. I was frightened and the pain made me faint. I called once, but nobody answered. I felt as if I was in an old dungeon, like those we saw in France, and if I moved or called rats would come and bite me, or I should drop into a well and drown. Besides, I hadn't the least idea how to get back. Of course it was perfectly silly. I called once more after a long while, and once I thought I heard some one scream. And then, ages after, there were knocks and I knocked back. That's all. Did some one really scream or did I imagine that?"

"I did. I thought it was a ghost," explained Helen.

Betty laughed. "I'm pursued by ghosts these days. The Morton Hall girls hear

them, and Dorothy and poor little Shirley Ware—why, I wonder if there could be a secret passageway at Miss Dick's! It's an old, rambling sort of house. I must ask about it when I go back."

But by the time Betty had spent a week on a couch at Babe's, recovering from her sprained ankle, her mind was so full of more important things which must be attended to "at once if not sooner," to quote Emily's delightful formula, that she quite forgot to inquire of Miss Dick about the secret passage. It was better, too, perhaps, to let sleeping dogs lie. Shirley was back at school again, and her wan little face must be a sad reminder to any big girl who had played a practical joke on her. Miss Dick still felt sure that there had been no joke—that Shirley had conjured up a ghost out of her own imagination. It would be a bad plan, possibly, to stir the matter up again.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

AT least once every week Betty dropped into Mrs. Post's room to talk over the progress of their charges and the state of the house in general.

"The Goop is as bad as ever," Betty complained one windy afternoon in March. "I've just been up in her room—she's begun again throwing whatever she doesn't need at the moment under her bed, and whenever she's in a hurry or especially happy at meal times she shovels things in with her knife. Do you think she ought to be allowed to stay here another year?"

"Maybe she'll decide to stop studying and teach for a while," suggested the optimistic Mrs. Post. "She's thinking of it. But if it's important for her to learn tidiness and table manners—which it certainly is—she certainly is more likely to do it here than anywhere else, with me nagging at her and you looking sweet and sorry. Now I'll warrant she's down

on her knees this very minute clearing up her floor, because you saw it looking disorderly. She thinks a lot of pleasing you. And the other girls don't mind her habits much ; she's good for them as a horrible example."

"The Twin Digs have been reported again for lights after ten," said Betty, who was in a downhearted mood.

"Only once since—since—well, I'm afraid I can't truthfully say since Christmas," laughed Mrs. Post. "I guess what those two need is a show of firmness. I'll see them to-night and tell them that the very next time means a report to President Wallace."

"Miss Romance has had three callers again this week, hasn't she?"

"Three calls, but only one caller. She's settled down to one now, and I guess he's all right—he seems to be a real nice country boy. He lives in the little place where she does, and he walks six miles and back each time he comes to call. Seems to me that shows he's fond enough of her to mean business. As for her, college is all nonsense for a girl like that. She hasn't sense enough to take it in. She'd better be at work or helping

her mother, or making a home of her own. She'll always be silly and rattle-pated and provoking to sensible people, as long as she lives. I've told her so—I mean I've advised her not to struggle along here through the whole course."

Betty sighed. "I suppose you're right. Not every girl is capable of getting much out of college. Well, anyway, there's always the Thorn to congratulate ourselves on. She's really turning out to be a very pleasant, helpful person to have in the house."

Mrs. Post nodded. "She's your triumph, and Esther Bond is mine. She says she's been happier down in this room talking to me about my three girls and the weather and the price of eggs and the way the laundry tears our linen than she's been before in her whole life. I wish I could make her see that if she enjoys being friends with a stupid old lady like me, she'd enjoy ten times more being intimate with girls of her own age. She doesn't dispute me. She just smiles that terribly tragic smile of hers, shakes her head, and changes the subject."

"Do you suppose some one has hurt her

feelings?" asked Betty. "Or is she just naturally secretive and reserved?"

"She's naturally very confiding," declared Mrs. Post. "Seems as if she was friends with everybody in the village where she lived when she was little. Something's happened, and it's happened since she came here, I think. But whatever it is she's bound nobody shall ever know about it. And when she makes up her mind she makes it up hard and to stay."

"I wonder if the ghost noises have stopped, or if the Thorn has just suppressed the reports?" Betty queried. "I never quite understood why the Mystery didn't complain the day they nearly battered down her door."

"She's never even mentioned it to me," Mrs. Post declared. "She seems to hate to talk about anything connected with her college life. She acts smart enough. She doesn't have any trouble keeping up with her classes, does she?"

Betty shook her head. "She's very good in most things—I asked Miss Ferris about her—only she never answers except when she's asked directly, and then she says just as little

as she can. Miss Raymond had her over one day this winter to tell her that her themes were very promising, only they stopped just when the reader was beginning to be interested. But Miss Bond said she always wrote down all that she thought of on each subject, and she acted so frightened and unhappy that Miss Raymond let her go home and hasn't tried to encourage her since. It must be dreadful to be so shy that every one thinks you're offish, and even the faculty don't dare to pursue their efforts to help you along. Just think, Mrs. Post! She might be one of the leading writers in her class, if she'd only let Miss Raymond take an interest in her work. Couldn't you talk to her about it? I'm sure she'd enjoy the recognition, and perhaps when she felt that she had a position of her own in the college she'd be willing to come out of her shell and make friends."

"I'll try to lead up to it some way," Mrs. Post promised warily. "She never wants to talk about college affairs, you see."

A night or two later Betty was awakened out of a sound sleep by one of the 'Twin Digs, who stood over her with a candle, explaining



in a sepulchral whisper, "There's a girl in a fire-escape dangling outside my window."

Betty rubbed her eyes, sat up, and, having thus assured herself that she was not dreaming nonsense, asked the Dig what she meant.

"Why, there's a girl in a fire-escape dangling outside my window," repeated the Dig hopelessly. "You know the new rope fire-escapes that are in all our rooms? Well, she evidently got into one up on the fourth floor, and started to slide to the ground, and somehow it's stuck with her half-way down. I mean the part you put over your shoulders, that's on a pulley to slide down the rope, has stuck and won't slide. I couldn't possibly pull her in alone, and I thought I'd better call you."

"Yes, of course." Betty jumped out of bed, and followed her incoherent informant up-stairs to a third floor single. The window was wide open and, sure enough, just out of reach, a girl, clearly visible in the moonlight, hung in mid-air, clinging to a dangling rope. When she saw the two figures appear in the lighted window, instead of calling to them or asking help or advice, she threw her whole

weight on the rope and gave one furious jerk. The pulley suddenly began to work again and, caught unprepared, she lost her hold on the rope. It slipped swiftly through her fingers and she was carried downward at a terrific rate, landing with a thud on the rose bed under the window.

Betty and the Dig had watched her descent in helpless horror. Now Betty seized the candle and raced down-stairs and out into the cold night, the Dig automatically following. Round to the back of the house they went, both expecting to find a senseless body, bruised and bleeding, on the ground. Instead a girl was walking rather stiffly out from among the burlap-swathed rose-bushes.

"I'm not hurt," she called softly. "You'll catch cold. Run back to your beds, please, and don't mind me."

Betty paused in amazement, and suddenly realizing that it was indeed bitterly cold for kimonos and Turkish slippers over bare feet she thrust the candle, which the moonlight rendered useless, into the Dig's hands, and ordered her back into the house.

"I'll come and see you later," she explained.

"Take the catch off the door for me. I want to be sure she really isn't hurt, and ——"

Betty hurried off. It wasn't necessary to explain to the Dig how college discipline demanded that she discover the identity of the girl, and her reasons for making an exit from Morton Hall in so unconventional a fashion.

The girl was limping down the road toward the Belden House. "Wait!" Betty called, running after her. "It's Miss Wales. I must speak to you a minute."

The girl paused, glanced around as if counting the chances of escape, and waited.

"Aren't you hurt?" Betty demanded as she came closer. "We thought the fall would surely stun you. Your hands must be terribly cut."

"Oh, not much," the girl answered, putting them resolutely behind her. "I had on gloves. And there was a little snow on the ground close to the house, to break the fall. You want to know who I am, Miss Wales, and what I was doing in the Morton so late. Well, it's all very simple. I'm Helena Mason. I was up talking to Esther Bond and we got

interested and didn't hear either of the bells. I hated to bother any one to let me out, so I told Esther I'd slide down the fire-escape—it's good practice for a fire. And because it stuck for a minute some silly girl imagined I needed help and called you. I'm sorry you were disturbed. The night-watchman will be along soon—if I can't make some girl hear me right away and let me in. Won't you please go back now?"

Betty was shivering with cold. "Yes, and you must come with me," she said. "You limp dreadfully. Waiting out in the cold after a fall like that would be positively dangerous. The girl who rooms next to me is away, and you can go to bed there."

"But I'd much rather go home," Helena demurred. "I won't have to wait but a minute, and I'm not at all cold."

"You're shivering this minute," Betty told her, "and your hands are cut so that they're bleeding on to the ground. You must come and let me fix them for you." And putting her arm through Helena's she hurried her back to Morton Hall.

Helena submitted in silence while Betty

bathed and bandaged the torn hands, and helped her to undress.

"Now shall I tell Esther to come and say good-night?" she asked. "I'm going to tell the girl who discovered you that you're really all right—we couldn't believe our eyes when you got up and walked off—and I'll go on up and tell Esther too. She must have seen you fall and she'll be worrying."

"Oh, no, she didn't," Helena assured her. "Please don't disturb her, Miss Wales. I'm sure she's sound asleep. And Miss Wales—will you have to tell the other girl—the one who saw me—who I am? I'd so much rather not. People will laugh at me so."

"You ought to be thankful they haven't got to mourn for you," laughed Betty. "I can't see how you escaped being badly hurt. Well, I won't mention any name then, Miss Mason; only in return you must promise me never to go out of our house by such a dangerous route again."

"I won't," agreed the girl. "You see I didn't know you or Mrs. Post, and I thought you might be awfully cross at my having stayed after ten."

"But Esther knew us," Betty protested. "She oughtn't to have let you try such a thing in the dark and cold unless there was a real necessity for it."

"She had nothing to say about it, Miss Wales," explained Helena coldly. "I've often—I'm not a bit afraid of a fire-escape, and I just said so and went ahead. She had nothing to do with it at all."

The Dig was awake and waiting for Betty. She listened eagerly to the scant news that was vouchsafed her, and pointedly did not inquire Helena's name.

"She knows who it was," Betty guessed shrewdly.

"Let's not say anything about it," she suggested aloud. "It might frighten the girls about trying the new fire-escapes, and it will make this particular girl seem very absurd."

"All right," agreed the Dig briskly. "But such things always do get out, Miss Wales. Other people must have seen her hanging there or heard her fall and then the talking afterward."

Betty crept up to the fourth floor, and knocked very softly on Esther Bond's door.

Instantly the door was unlocked, and Esther demanded nervously what the matter was.

"Nothing at all," Betty quieted her, "but I thought you might know that Helena got carried down too fast on her fire-escape, so I came to tell you that she's all right, only bruised a little and her hands are cut."

"No, I didn't know she fell," said Esther apathetically, "but I heard you talking to her, and wondered why you had gone out after her. I'm glad she's not hurt."

"Next time you mustn't let her try such a thing," Betty told her gravely. "Call me and I'll let out anybody who has stayed too late by mistake."

"It wasn't a mistake, Miss Wales," Esther explained calmly. "Helena wasn't ready to go at ten, so she stayed; that's all. She comes here when she likes and goes when she likes, and as she likes. If you're blaming me for this you don't know Helena Mason."

Helena insisted upon leaving before breakfast the next morning. Her hands were sore, and she was stiff and bruised all over, but she managed to dress without help, and insisted that she was well enough to get her books

and go to her classes. At noon she was back again, nervously inquiring for Betty.

"I lost a paper last night, Miss Wales," she explained. "I had tucked it into my ulster pocket. Did you pick it up, or has anybody in this house found it and brought it to you or Mrs. Post?"

Betty had not seen the paper, but she promised to inquire. The Thorn, it developed, had found it that morning and given it to Esther Bond.

"It was in her writing," she explained. "It was a Lit. paper, and a dandy one too. I read it. Wish I'd seen it before I handed mine in." She grinned cheerfully. "I can say that to you, Miss Wales, because you can tell a joke when you see one. Helena Mason can't. Rather than be laughed at for her fire-escape escapade she's given the impression that she burned her hands with her student lamp. And the people who know what really happened are smiling a little and wondering a lot."

A week later the Thorn came to Betty again, her eyes round with amazement. "I'm not a gossip, Miss Wales," she began, "but



that paper—the one in Esther Bond's writing that Miss Mason lost and I found—was read to-day in Lit. 6, as the best one handed in. And it was signed by Helena Mason. I wish now that I hadn't read it. I never thought there was any harm in reading a theme that you happened to pick up."

"There's a lot of harm in jumping to conclusions," Betty warned her hastily. "Helena's writing may be so like Esther's that it deceived you, or Esther may have copied Helena's paper for her. That's the right explanation, I'm sure. A good many girls hire their papers copied, you know."

The Thorn sighed and started at Betty admiringly. "And I never saw any possibility except that Helena Mason had hired her theme written. I must have a horrid, suspicious mind, I suppose, Miss Wales. I'm glad I came right to you first, and I shan't mention the matter to any one else."

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE MYSTERY SOLVED

MRS. POST had the grippe. "Why couldn't I have waited until the spring vacation?" she sighed forlornly. "Then this house would be empty, and my daughter—the one who's a nurse—was coming up anyway to visit me. And now I'm bothering everybody and making lots of extra trouble."

Betty reassured her tactfully. "It's not the busy season for Student's Aid secretaries," she said. "Whatever of your work I specially don't like, I shall saddle on some girl. They're all crazy to do things for you. It's worth being ill once in a while to see how much people think of you."

Late that afternoon Betty remembered that she had forgotten to distribute towels on the fourth floor, and went up to see about it. The Mystery's door was open, she noticed, and a group of fourth floor girls were inside, eagerly admiring a dress that had just come to the Thorn from home.

Betty threw them a merry word of greeting and went on to the linen closet. It was a cloudy afternoon and the tiny high window let in very little light. "I must write to Jim to complain of his dark linen-presses," she thought, with a smile. And then, reaching out her hand to draw the curtain away from some shelves, she jumped back with a scream of terror. Her hand had hit the head of somebody who was crouched in a heap behind the curtains. Betty's cry brought half a dozen girls on the run to the linen-closet door.

"It's nothing," Betty told them, clinging to the door-post to steady herself, for she was trembling with fright. "That is—now, girls, don't scream or faint or do anything foolish. Some one had hidden in there—some girl in the house, perhaps, for fun. Whoever it is won't hurt us here all together in broad daylight. Now come out, please," called Betty, raising her voice and looking hard at the curtains.

There was a moment of awful stillness and then a tall girl straightened to her full height behind the quivering curtains and came forward, flushing hotly, to the door. It was

Helena Mason. She paid no attention to Betty and the girls about her but, looking over their heads, faced Esther Bond, who stood watching the scene with a curious air of detachment from the door of her room. And the look that Helena Mason gave her said as plainly as words could have done, "I hate you. I hate you. I hate you."

But the look the Mystery sent back said, "I am beyond hating you or any one else."

There was a long silence. Betty and the girls with her were too amazed to speak, and Helena Mason stood quietly defiant, as if daring any one to question her. At last the Thorn, gay in her new dress, broke the tension.

"Come on down to my room, girls, and finish your inspection of me there," she suggested. "Miss Wales doesn't need any more protection. We're just in the way here now."

They caught her point instantly, and trooped after her down-stairs, leaving Betty, Helena, and the Mystery to settle the matter as best they might. When they had gone Helena laughed a strained little laugh and began to explain herself.

"You're always catching me in absurd situations, Miss Wales. But this can be explained as easily as the fire-escape affair. I'm sure you know I wasn't trying to steal your sheets and towels. I had a reason for not wanting the girls in the house to know I was in Esther's room to-day, so when I came up-stairs and found some of them with her, I slipped in here to wait till they'd gone; and you came and found me. That's all."

Betty had been thinking fast. "But the door was locked, Miss Mason—it is kept locked. How did you manage to get in and then lock it again?"

Helena flushed. "The key to any of these doors will unlock any other, Miss Wales."

"But where did you get such a key?" Betty persisted. "How did you happen to have one ready to-day?"

"I took it out of one of the doors over there." Helena pointed vaguely toward a cluster of empty rooms.

"Where is it now?" Betty demanded.

Helena flushed redder than ever. "I'm sure I don't know—on the floor in there, probably."

Betty got a match and began groping around on the floor of the linen room. But after a minute Esther Bond, who had said nothing so far, came forward and confronted Helena.

"Why don't you tell the truth at once?" she asked. "You'll have to in the end. Don't hunt there, Miss Wales. She's wearing the key on her watch-chain."

"Give it to me, please," Betty said, coming out into the light. She noticed that Helena took her watch off the chain first, and then slipped out the key. "So you didn't take it to-day," she said.

"I never said when I took it," Helena flashed back angrily. "I've had it several weeks, if you want to know. The girls in this house are bores and frightfully curious. Whenever I don't want to see them and have them fussing around, why, I come in here and wait till Esther is alone. There's no great harm in that, as far as I can see. I've done it all winter."

Betty was frankly puzzled what to answer. "Why, no—except that you gave me a dreadful fright just now," she said slowly. "And

—yes, Miss Mason, there is harm in it. It's a sly and sneaking way of acting. No girl would hide in here as you say you have done without a good reason, and the reason can't but be discreditable. I don't ask you to tell me what it is, but I do ask you and Esther to talk it over and think what you ought to do about it. And if you want any advice from me or Mrs. Post, when she's better, or want to tell us anything in justice to yourselves or the house, why, we shall be only too glad to help."

Betty gathered up her towels and departed, hoping she had said the right thing and devoutly wishing, as she caught a glimpse of herself in a mirror, that she looked older and more impressive, the better to emphasize her good advice. Half-way down the stairs she halted. "Why, she's the ghost!" she said to herself. "I've caught our ghost! How queer that I never thought of that till now. And I'm afraid that in this case the Thorn is right about the connection between ghosts and somebody's wrong-doing. Either Helena Mason is crazy, or she's hiding something that she's ashamed of. I wish Esther would tell

Mrs. Post all about it. It's so queer that it worries me."

A few minutes later there was a knock on Betty's door. The Mystery, a strained, frightened look in her big eyes, stood outside.

"I've come to explain myself," she said. "You've been very kind, and Mrs. Post—I couldn't bear to have her know this, Miss Wales. But I owe it to you that you should understand, and then I want you to advise me. Helena wouldn't come. She has decided what to do, she says—she will leave college at the spring recess. I am as bad as she in a way, and perhaps I ought to leave too. Indeed, I may have to."

"Begin at the beginning and tell me about it," urged Betty.

The Mystery nodded. "It began when we were little girls. She and her mother used to spend the summers in our village. Her mother took a fancy to me. She used to tell us that if Helena had my brains or I Helena's face she should have an ideal daughter. She's very ambitious. She was always pushing Helena along in her schools—bringing down tutors in the summer to teach her languages



and coach her in her theme-work. She let me study with them, too, because she thought my work would inspire Helena. Helena hates to study, and hasn't much head for it. Her mother had set her heart on her coming to Harding and making a name for herself here. When she heard that I wanted dreadfully to come, she sent for me and offered to pay my expenses if I would help Helena, especially in theme-work.

"I never thought how it would be—it sounded all right—like tutoring. So I promised. Helena insisted that I should live off at the end of nowhere, so she could come to me without any one's finding it out. I soon saw what she wanted of me—not tutoring, but help. I was to write all her papers, take all her notes and read them to her,—do all her work and see that she got the credit. At the end of last year I got tired of it, and I thought I could pay my own way. But when I spoke to Helena she said she would tell the whole story, and that it would look as black for me as for her. 'Only I shall go home where no one knows or cares,' she said, 'except mother, who can't defend her

plan, and you will stay here—or you'll stop and teach and never get a decent position, because they won't recommend a cheat.' So I've kept on. When you asked me to come and live here Helena was furious. She said she couldn't come to see me here without being seen—of course things have leaked out, and she's been suspected of getting help, but nothing has ever been proved. I wouldn't give in—I wanted so to come.

“But I did arrange to have a room away from the others, and I've kept the door locked so they wouldn't come in suddenly and find her here or see a paper I'd written for her to hand in. She gets stupider and lazier all the time, I think. She can't do the simplest thing for herself now. She had an absurd story ready to explain all this. I told her I wouldn't help her with it. I'm sick of being the brains of Helena Mason. I want to be myself—to have the use of my own ideas and abilities. I'm tired of selling my brains and my self-respect for a college education that other girls earn easily with their hands. It wasn't a fair bargain. Of course I shall pay back the money as soon as I can. But

whether I go or stay, I shall be free from now on to be myself—not a nonentity sucked dry to help a rich girl get into Dramatic Club and Philosophical and the Cercle Français, and to make a reputation for the brains her mother admires. Now you understand me, Miss Wales. Tell me what to do.”

Betty hesitated. “I’m not sure that I do understand. You mean that you’ve actually written all Helena Mason’s papers?”

Esther nodded. “Ready for her to copy. At first I only corrected hers, but for nearly two years I’ve written them outright. And I’ve studied nearly every lesson for her—taken all the notes for us both, and recited as little as possible myself, so the resemblances in our work shouldn’t be noticed. Now I shall come forward and take part in things. Oh, it will be splendid, Miss Wales!” She paused uncertainly. “But perhaps you think I’ve been too dishonest to deserve a loan from the Student’s Aid, or any chance of earning money. If I’d only known, before I came, that there were plenty of chances! I didn’t realize it even after I came, when Helena first proposed my doing the things that seemed to

me unfair. I did them because I hated to quarrel with her—and after I'd done them she held them over me. She's not as mean as she seems, Miss Wales. Her mother has brought her up to feel that appearances are the only thing that count."

The cloak of diffidence and reserve had fallen away from the girl. She could speak for herself and for her friend in eloquent defense. Betty watched and listened, amazed at the sudden change in her. She was free at last to be herself.

"No," Betty said at last, "I don't think you have forfeited your chance. Mrs. Mason was most to blame, in suggesting the plan and not then seeing that her daughter did her own work. Helena shall have another chance too, if I can arrange it for her and she will take it; but it will probably mean explaining to her teachers how her work has been done so far. With you"—Betty considered—"I don't see why you shouldn't let them explain the change in you to suit themselves. You'll be a great mystery to them"—Betty smiled at her. "We've called you that—the Mystery—Mrs. Post and I, when we've talked about you.

I'm glad our Mystery is solved at last. You haven't seemed quite real to me up in your lonely tower room."

"Haunted by ghosts," added Esther, with a sad smile. "I know what the girls have thought, you see. I couldn't say anything. Now I suppose there'll be more stories, especially if Helena leaves college."

But the Thorn had arranged that. "I've told the girls that loyalty to you means silence, Miss Wales," she explained to Betty. "I proved to them how dangerous it is to guess about queer things like that, and they've all promised not to say a word about anything they saw. Of course"—the Thorn couldn't resist so fine a chance to plume herself on her superiority—"finding that paper and the fire-escape business and Miss Mason's story about it can't help giving me some very interesting suspicions, but they shall never pass my lips."

Next Betty went to see Helena, prepared to offer to help her through her crisis; but Helena had made her plans and was determined to abide by them.

"I couldn't stay on, Miss Wales," she said,

“and I certainly don’t want to. I’ve had a good time here, laughing in my sleeve at the people I’ve taken in with my clever stories, and pretty verses—why, the one to Agatha Dwight actually made a splash that rippled away down to New York. The funny thing about it is that the stories and all are like me. Mother attracts fascinating, out-of-the-way people, and we’ve always lived among them in an atmosphere of unusual, fascinating happenings. How in the world that little country girl gets hold of it is a mystery to me. She’s never seen such people, or been to their dinners or behind the scenes at their plays. I’ve never even told her much.”

“That’s the mystery of genius,” said Betty, who had thought a great deal about Esther Bond. “You never can explain it.”

“And if you haven’t got it,” said Helena hopelessly, “you can’t get it. I’m not unusual. I shall never shine except in mother’s reflected glory. I’m sorry for mother; she’s wasted so much time and money trying to make me seem clever. Now she’s got to get used to having a perfectly commonplace daughter. I shall do my best

to make her like the real me, but at any rate she'll have to endure me as I am. I shan't permit any more efforts at veneering me. They're too demoralizing."

So Helena departed at Easter, amid the laments of her class. She would have been editor-in-chief of the "Argus" and Ivy Orator if she had stayed, they told her.

"I've willed my honors to the undiscovered geniuses," she retorted daringly. "I'm tired of being called the cleverest girl in the class. I'm going home to give the rest of you a chance. College never exactly suited my style."

Heartless, mocking, careless of what she had stolen, even unconscious of what she was restoring to the girl in the tower room, Helena left Harding, and no more ghosts disturbed the peace of Morton Hall.

One day just before the winter term closed, Eugenia stopped in to see Betty on her way home from Miss Dick's.

"Something's the matter with Dorothy," she said. "I came back early, so you would have time to run over and see her before she goes to bed. She seems to be dreadfully dis-

turbed about something and homesick and unhappy. She kept saying that nothing was the matter, but the tears would come creeping out. I don't think she's sick—just unhappy."

"I'll ask Miss Dick to let her come and stay with me to-night," Betty suggested, slipping on an ulster.

Dorothy flew into her big sister's arms, and fairly danced for joy when she was told that Betty had come to take her home.

"Have things been going criss-cross with you lately?" Betty asked her, as they ran back, hand in hand, to Morton Hall.

"Yes," whispered Dorothy solemnly, "they have. Do you happen to feel like a reckless ritherum to-night, Betty dear?"

"Not especially to-night," laughed Betty. "Do you?"

The Smallest Sister sighed profoundly. "Yes. I guess I shan't ever stop feeling so as long as I live."

"Not even if we should make hot chocolate in a chafing-dish?"

"That would be splendid," Dorothy admitted eagerly, "but, Betty dear, it wouldn't



make you feel the same about a person who'd pretended to be very fond of you and all the same she did a mean hateful thing, would it now?"

Betty admitted that hot chocolate might not be able to wipe out all the sting of false friendship. "But maybe the person didn't mean to be mean," she suggested hopefully.

Dorothy's little face was very sober. "I'm sure she didn't know how sad it would seem to me," she explained. "Betty, let's play I was mistaken, and enjoy our hot chocolate as much as ever we can."

But when it came time to put out the light, Dorothy pleaded that it should be left burning "just a teeny, weeny speck, like a night-lamp."

"What's the matter, Dottie?" objected Betty. "Have you been seeing ghosts again?"

"Whatever made you think of that?" asked Dorothy anxiously. "I never said a single word about ghosts. Besides, I couldn't see her again, because I didn't see her before—I only heard her."

"Well, you won't see or hear any ghosts

here," Betty assured her, turning out the light. "When I'm around they all vanish, and real people come in their places. So you can go to sleep this minute, and sleep as sound as ever you can."

An hour or two later Betty, who had given her bed to Dorothy, and was curled up on the box-couch, was awakened by the shrill sound of a little voice pleading piteously. It was Dorothy, fast asleep but sitting bolt upright in bed and talking in a strained, perfectly intelligible monotone.

"Oh, please don't, Frisky, please don't!" she moaned. "I want to scream so, and I know I mustn't. You look terrible in that white dress. Take down your hands, please, Frisky, please! I know it's you, so why do you go on pretending? I never meant to tell Betty about your having the candle-shade. You said you'd forgive me. But you said you forgave Shirley, and then you frightened her so that she'll never get over it. Oh, I mustn't scream or they'll find you out! Please, please go away, Frisky, and don't try to frighten me any more."

The tears were streaming down the Small-

est Sister's face, and she seemed to be in mortal terror. Betty went to her and shook her softly awake, soothing her with pet names and caresses. And then, between sobs, the whole story came out.

"Oh, Betty, you must never, never tell, but Frisky was the ghost! I made her mad at me because I said she oughtn't to have taken a candle-shade from the Tally-ho the night you asked us two to dinner. I saw it in her drawer the other day, and I said she ought to give it right back. And then she told me I was a meddlesome little thing. But when I most cried she said she'd make up and forgive me. But last night when my two room-mates were away, there was a knocking near the chimney and a moan, and a ghost came right out of the wall, just as Shirley said, with its hands up to its face, and it was Frisky in a white sheet."

"Well, then you needn't have been scared any more," said Betty soothingly.

"A person in a white sheet is rather scaring," declared Dorothy, "especially if you're awfully scared to begin with. She glided around and around, and she wouldn't speak

to me when I whispered to her that I knew her. So then I shivered and shook till morning. She might have scared me just as she did Shirley—she couldn't tell. Shirley will stutter and her eyes will twitch always, the doctor says. But Frisky called me her funny little chum to-day, and just laughed when I accused her of being the ghost. And I can't quarrel without telling why, and if I tell, something perfectly dreadful will happen to Frisky."

"She well deserves it for frightening and tyrannizing over you little girls," said Betty severely.

"Oh, Betty, you mustn't tell! You promised not to. Only always let me come and stay with you when my roommates are away."

"You certainly shall," Betty promised, "and do hurry and get ready for college, Dottie. Boarding-school girls are such complete sillies!"

## CHAPTER XVIII

### FRISKY FENTON'S FOLLY

MR. THAYER'S May party was to be a Doll Festival. Georgia had thought of it, and she and Fluffy Dutton had made sure that the college was "properly excited" over its "features."

"No use taking the darling dolls home," Georgia declared. "The new climate wouldn't agree with them. No use packing them away in messy boxes, with books and pillows and pictures. By next fall the doll fever will be over."

"There can be doll dances in costume, and a doll play, if Madeline isn't too famous to write one. The May-pole dancers can be dressed like dolls too."

Fluffy sighed and interrupted: "Shan't you mind at all parting with Wooden?"

"Not a bit," returned Georgia, the matter-of-fact. "Let's get a paper ready for the girls to sign, with the number of dolls they can furnish opposite their names."

Straight signed for one doll without a murmur of protest, but it was not Rosa Marie that she put on the pile in Georgia's borrowed express cart on the day of the May party. Not even to her beloved Fluffy did she confide her intention of never, never parting from her dear Rosa Marie.

The party was on the factory lawn, and the college part of it overflowed hungrily into the Tally-ho's territory, or climbed up to view the animated scene comfortably from the Peter Pan's upper stories. The doll dances and May dances came first, and then everybody gathered around the pile of dolls that rose like a haystack on the slope of the hill, while Babbie led the little girls one by one, beginning with the smallest and most forlorn and ragged, up to the pile to choose a doll. Georgia strutted like a peacock because Wooden was the very first one selected, and Fluffy refused to be comforted when the fat little Polander who had chosen her Esquimaux promptly sat down on it and cracked its skull.

"Never mind, dearie," Straight consoled her. "Having dolls to smash is part of the

fun of having them at all. Mr. Thayer will glue it together, and that child will never think about the crack."

"It's queer," gulped Fluffy, "how fond you get of everything you have up here at college—your friends and your room, and even your footless little toys."

"Because they're the very last toys we'll ever, ever have," said Straight soberly. "Why didn't you keep the Esquimaux, if you cared so much?"

"Because I kept the Baby and its nurse," explained Fluffy shamefacedly. Whereupon Straight confessed to having bought a substitute for Rosa Marie, and the twins departed to the Tally-ho to celebrate their perfect harmony of spirit in cooling glasses of lemonade.

Betty was catering for the party, acting as special reception committee for all the shy and friendless factory hands, and finding time between to consult flitting members of the "Proper Excitement" and "Proper Encouragement" committees. Money-making summers must be arranged for some of the Morton Hall girls, and positions assured for many needy seniors. Betty had started a Harding

teacher's agency, and already the demands upon it were almost greater than the supply.

"But I don't intend they shall teach unless they really want to," Betty decreed, "and not unless they're at least a little fitted to. Teaching isn't the only way for earning money—look at the Tally-ho. Mr. Morton wants a private secretary if I can honestly recommend one. He's been telling his friends about my ideas of fitting people to positions, and I got the funniest letter from one of them—a very distinguished author. She said the woman question would soon be settled if I kept on insisting that a woman's work should be her true vocation. Best of all, she wants a manager for a lace shop she is interested in, and a chaperon for her two daughters who are to study art in Paris next winter. Those are two splendid openings."

"There are a lot of dolls left," Babbie announced, having finished her distribution. "I think Bob would like them sent to New York for her floating hospitals and playgrounds. Where shall we put them? I'm afraid it's going to rain."

"In the Tally-ho workroom," Betty de-



cided rapidly. "It does look like rain. Then we'd better have the ice-cream and cakes in the club-house. Where's Nora? Babbie, could you ask Mr. Thayer to tell them all to go to the club-house? Why will it always pour on garden parties?"

She had just found Nora, sent her to give new orders to the men who were carrying the ice-cream, made sure that Bridget had taken all the cakes over, and started across the lawn herself, when the storm broke—a pelting spring shower that sent her scurrying back to the deserted Tally-ho in search of an umbrella and rubbers. Before she had found them, a forlorn, dripping little figure fell upon her.

"Oh, Betty dear," cried the Smallest Sister, "I went to the party to find you—Mr. Thayer asked me to come, but I only went to find you. And I didn't like to climb the fence, as long as it was a party, so I came all the way around, and I'm soaked. Betty, something awful has happened. Frisky has run away."

Betty stared in dismay. "Dorothy, I haven't a minute to spare now. Take Emily's umbrella and hurry home and get off those wet things. I'll come to see you to-

night, but I can't possibly stop now—nothing will go right if I'm not there."

"About the ice-cream, you mean?" demanded Dorothy. "To-night will be too late to do anything about Frisky."

"But, dearie," Betty told her, "I can't do anything about Frisky. If she's run away from Miss Dick's school, why, Miss Dick is the one to attend to it."

"Miss Dick doesn't know."

"Then why not tell her instead of me?"

"Because," said Dorothy simply, "you always know what to do. Miss Dick and Kittie Carson wouldn't know. They'd never find her and never get her to come back. Isn't it very awful indeed to run away and be an actress, Betty?"

Betty laid down her umbrella, wrapped her coat around Dorothy, and with one anxious glance in the direction of the supper that she was relentlessly abandoning bent her energies to settling her responsibilities toward Frisky Fenton.

"Does any one else know where Frisky has gone?" she asked.

"I think maybe her roommates do. She

came and told me this morning, and gave me a blue ribbon for a keepsake. She said she couldn't bear to go without any good-byes to her chums. She said, 'Don't tell any one,' but of course she didn't mean you. She knows I tell you everything since ——"

"And where has she gone?"

"To the Junction, to join that company that was acting here all last week. They're going 'way out west after to-night. That's why you must hurry."

"Why on earth did she do that, Dottie?"

"'Cause her stepmother was so unsympathetic," explained Dorothy, "at Easter vacation, you know, about a new hat, and a party, and going to see Miss Dwight in Miss Madeline's play. And yesterday Miss Dick scolded her and kept her in to write French verbs. So she just decided to go off and be an actress."

"And why do you think I can get her to come back?"

"'Cause she said once she'd love to have a sympathetic sister like you. You understand exactly how girls feel."

Betty sighed.

"Besides," Dorothy went on, "you know an

actress. Frisky knows three—Miss Dwight and the ones that are the hero and heroine in this company. She went to a play they acted here one afternoon called ‘East Lynne,’ and she waited outside by the back door and met them, and they encouraged her.”

“But, Dorothy, I thought you weren’t intimate with Frisky any more since you found out she was the ghost.”

“We never stopped being chums,” said Dorothy, bursting into a sudden flood of tears. “I’m sure she’ll be sick of being by herself by to-night, and scared, and I almost think she’d expect me to send you after her.”

Betty looked at her watch. It was nearly six. The next train to the Junction would be the theatre express. “All right, little sister, I’ll go,” she said cheerfully. “Only I can’t take the whole responsibility. You must let me send a note to Miss Dick.”

So Betty wrote Miss Dick that Francisca Fenton had gone to the Junction alone on a foolish errand, that she was going after her on the theatre train, and that if Miss Dick wished to come too they could go together. “But

I'm quite sure I can manage alone," she added, "and perhaps she would feel less humiliated at having me find her."

And as Miss Dick didn't appear at the train, it was to be presumed that she shared the general faith in Betty Wales.

As she sped to the station Betty noted the name of the company—"Pratt Players"—on a dilapidated bill-board, and on the train she planned out her campaign. She would drive to the place where they were playing, and if Frisky was there or they knew where she was, all would be plain sailing. If not, the police and private detectives must be put to work, under pledges of secrecy. She couldn't see that Miss Dick would be needed, no matter which way things went.

But she had no sooner arrived at the Junction than her plans were suddenly thrown all awry. None of the station officials, none of the cabmen at the corner, knew anything about the Pratt Players.

"'The Pink Moon' at the Lyric, Shakespeare at the Grand, and I'm not sure about the Paxton," the man at the information bureau told her glibly.



"WE'LL FIND 'EM, MISS," HE ASSURED HER



A cabman remembered that the Paxton was closed. "But 'The Pink Moon' is a great show, ma'am," he assured Betty. "Drive you there for fifty cents."

Betty sped back to the information bureau. "Pratt Players?" repeated the man inside. "Pratt Players? Some ten-twenty-thirty outfit, I s'pose, doing a week at some little nickel theatre or music hall. City's full of them, miss.—Next train to Boston leaves in twenty minutes.—Lunch-room down-stairs, ma'am.—Where in South Dakota did you say you want to go?"

Betty turned away sick at heart. She had a vision of herself being driven aimlessly from one nickel theatre to another, in a vain search for the Pratt Players, while Frisky—— If only Miss Dick were here! She might telegraph for her. But first she pocketed pride and discretion and consulted the friendly cabman again. He had never heard of the Pratt Players. "But we'll find 'em, miss," he assured her, "if it takes all night. Got a friend in the company, miss?"

Betty turned away with much dignity toward the telegraph office. On the way she



tried to think what 19— girls had lived at the Junction. If only she could remember one she knew well enough to take with her on her quixotic search! There was a sudden press of people coming in from a newly arrived train. Betty stood aside forlornly to let them pass, when she felt her hand caught in a strong clasp and looked up to find Jim Watson towering over her.

“By all the luck!” he cried. “You here and alone! Come on to the theatre with me, Betty. Faculty don’t have to be chaperoned, even if accompanied by a dimple, do they? I was hoping to get up to Harding in time to call on you—got to be in Albany tomorrow on business for the firm. I say, Betty, how long is it since I’ve seen you?”

Betty didn’t wait to answer. “Come,” she ordered desperately, “and find a cab and help me hunt for the Pratt Players. I’ll explain after we’re started. I don’t know when I’ve been so glad to see somebody I know, Jim.”

“Look sharp now,” Jim told the cabman. “Extra fare if you hit the right place early in the game, understand.” Owing to which inducement cabby wasted but two guesses and

halted with a flourish in front of the dingy theatre occupied by the Pratt Players before the first curtain had risen on the faded splendors of "East Lynne."

Jim ordered the cab to wait, tipped a ticket-seller and a messenger boy to ascertain the name and whereabouts of the heroine, who presumably had Frisky in charge, escorted Betty down a dark alley to the stage-door, cautioned her to call if anything went wrong, and leaned comfortably against a post to await her return from the inner regions.

They had agreed that it would be better for Betty to go in alone; but she wished, as she opened the door and groped her way up a steep, narrow flight of stairs, that she had still the protection of Jim's unruffled, confident presence. She met two men on the stairs. One took no notice of her, the other tossed a "Late again, eh? You'll be docked," over his shoulder, and hurried on. At the top of the flight Betty halted aimlessly. Stage hands were busy moving battered scenery. A woman's querulous voice clamored impatiently for "Daisy!" Then above everything rose a man's angry remonstrance.

"Promised you nothing! You said you could dance, and you can't. If you could, you're good for a front row job, with that face. Oh, well," in answer to a low-voiced reminder, "I never thought you meant it. That was my little jolly. Don't you know jolly when you see it, little girl? Where'll you stay to-night? Lost all your money? Well, I'm losing more'n I ever had over this old show. It ain't my fault that you got lost this afternoon along with your pocketbook, and didn't get here till it was show-time. Anyway I haven't a thing for you at any hour of the day. If I was you I'd go right home to my mamma. Here's two plunks—that's all I can spare. So long, little girl."

Betty stepped forward toward the voice just in time to be run down by a frightened, tear-stained Frisky, clutching two silver dollars tight in her hand.

"Miss Wales!" she gasped. "Where did you come from?"

"I've got a carriage outside to take you home in," Betty told her quietly. "So you won't need that money. Let's give it back and then go."

At that the manager appeared, looking a little frightened, and protesting stoutly that he "hadn't never promised the kid a part." And when Betty didn't offer to dispute him, he seemed much relieved and grew obsequious and effusive, so that Betty was glad to remember that Jim was outside. When they finally got out to him, past the bowing, mincing manager, Jim tactfully fell into the rear of the procession, and rode back on the box with the driver, so that Frisky, who was hysterical with humiliation and relief, might have Betty all to herself.

Her story was just as Dorothy had told it. After getting to the Junction she had experienced the same difficulty that Betty had in finding the elusive Pratt Players; but not having thought of a cab, and being without Jim's effective methods of memory-jogging, she had walked all the afternoon, losing her pocketbook in the course of her wanderings, only to be told by one of her "encouraging" actor friends that he had only suggested her joining the company as a bit of harmless, pleasant "jolly."

"I'd saved three months' allowance, and

sold my turquoise ring to Josephine Briggs for three dollars," sighed Frisky. "What will Miss Dick say, Miss Wales, and what will she write home to my father?"

At the station Jim appeared with tickets and the cheering information that the next train wouldn't go for half an hour. So Frisky, who had had a banana for lunch and no dinner, was persuaded to gulp down a sandwich and a glass of milk, while Betty thanked Jim so fervently that he took heart and boldly inquired when he might come to Harding to make the call he had missed in the pursuit of Frisky.

On the train Frisky considered her future and dissolved in floods of woe.

"I couldn't stay without my money," she wailed, "but I simply cannot go back and face the awful scoldings I shall get. Miss Dick won't let me out of the school yard for the rest of the term, and I shouldn't wonder if she'd tell the whole story right out in chapel. If I hadn't been made to stay by myself so much and think, I shouldn't have thought of so many wrong things to do. I discovered the secret passage one day when I

was sent to my room to meditate. Who could resist trying to be a ghost, Miss Wales, with that secret passage all fixed up as if on purpose? I've felt awfully about Shirley——"

"And yet you did it again," said Betty sternly, "to Dorothy, who might have been just as badly frightened."

Frisky wept afresh. "I know it. She made me cross, and I didn't care. Sometimes I don't care what happens, Miss Wales, and other days I love everybody, even Miss Dick and my stepmother. The worst thing is that nobody trusts me. I meant to show them that I could be trusted to get along all right alone. And then I—I—I—lost my purse," sobbed Frisky wildly.

Betty patted her shoulder comfortingly. "That plan was all wrong," she said. "Suppose you were to come and consult me about things the way Dorothy does? I believe we could get to be good friends. I know a good many stage people," she added craftily, "the real kind, not the make-believes like those dreadful ones in the Pratt Company."

"But if ever I wanted to go on the stage you'd say no, Miss Wales," demurred Frisky.

"I should say that Miss Dwight knows more about it than either of us," amended Betty. "We are almost at Harding, Frisky. Shall I tell Miss Dick to-morrow that I'm to be your special consultation committee from now on, and that I'm willing to be responsible for your good behavior?"

"Responsible for my good behavior?" Frisky giggled, with a touch of her old irresponsible gaiety. "But I'm always in hot water, Miss Wales. I try sometimes, and sometimes I don't, but it always ends the same way."

"So you're not to be trusted, then," began Betty. "I thought you said ——"

"Oh!" Frisky considered it. "If I said I'd try all the time, and Miss Dick promised to overlook some little mistakes, and I should talk things over with you instead of with the other girls—I think sometimes they stir me up on purpose to see the rumpus there will be. Well, then you'd beg me off with Miss Dick. Is that it?"

"I'd explain to Miss Dick. I'd ask her to treat you as she does the oldest and most responsible girls—to trust you."

"She treats them all a good deal like in-

fants," murmured Frisky. She turned to Betty. "Thank you, Miss Wales. I don't know why you should do so much for me. If you are looking out for my good behavior, I'll certainly try not to make you sorry or to get you in a fix with Miss Dick." Frisky laughed again.

Betty took the sleepy Francisca home with her, and risked routing somebody up at Miss Dick's to make her report. Miss Dick herself answered her. "I found your note on my return," she explained. "One of Miss Fenton's roommates had grown worried and spoken to me earlier in the day. Miss Carson and I went down in the afternoon. No, we were not provided with the company's name, and we could not place them. Miss Carson is staying all night—the detective reports to her hourly. I shall wire her at once, of course. Miss Wales, you have done me an inestimable service in helping me to fulfil my trust to the child's parents. In the morning you will come over? Certainly, Miss Wales. Anything, anything! I am very deeply in your debt."

Betty smiled, a little later, over the picture



of the dignified Miss Dick, the subdued Kitty Carson, and a perturbed detective pursuing a phantom theatrical troupe and a pretty girl through the devious ways of the Junction.

“But I didn’t find them,” she reflected modestly. “It was Jim. I’m never the one that does things. It’s just my good luck and my good friends.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### ARCHITECT'S FINAL PLANS—CONSIDERED

BETTY WALES danced merrily across the campus to her office. It was commencement Monday. Betty hadn't meant to stay over at first, but the affairs of the teachers' agency were not quite settled, and they had kept her. Besides, Lucile Merrifield graduated, Georgia was a junior usher, Helen was to take her Master's degree, and 19— was coming back "in bunches," as Bob elegantly phrased it, for an "informal between-years" reunion. And finally Jim Watson was coming to make his much-heralded call on this very Monday evening. Betty had taken him to 19—'s own Glee Club concert, and he had suggested celebrating the anniversary, much to the disgust of the B. C. A.'s and the rest of the old 19— crowd, who found no occasion quite complete unless they could have Betty Wales in their midst.

Half-way to her office she was hailed by

President Wallace. "You'll be back next year, of course?" he asked. "The Morton couldn't do without you."

Betty blushed and laughed. "I hoped I could escape without being asked that, because I don't know. Mother and father say they are all right, but I must look them over and be quite sure before I decide to leave them again."

"Very well, only be quite sure also that we need you here," the President told her, and Betty hurried on, thinking hard about the next year at Morton Hall. It would certainly be very nice, with the Mystery explained and happy, Miss Romance departed to make a home for her devoted suitor, the Digs beginning to appreciate the inherent reasonableness of obeying rules, the Thorn no longer prickly, and the Goop boarding with a married sister who had providentially come to live in Harding.

"I don't believe her manners are worth the ruin of your disposition and mine," Betty had told Mrs. Post, when, in June, the Goop had horrified the house by appearing at breakfast collarless and with unbuttoned shoes.

Besides these improvements six seniors were leaving—rather dull, colorless girls, whose departure would make room for livelier, more promising material. Betty resolved that Morton Hall should be the gayest, jolliest house on the campus—if she came back.

Frisky Fenton was at the door of her office to meet her. She had been sitting on the stairs waiting.

“I’m going home this afternoon, Miss Wales,” she said. “I’ve taken all my prelims for Harding, and I hope I’ve passed most of them. Since I’ve been over here so much with you, I simply can’t wait to get into college. Miss Wales, I’ve come to consult you for one last time. How shall I make my stepmother love me?”

Betty smiled into Frisky’s melting brown eyes that were fixed upon her so earnestly. “Didn’t Miss Dwight advise you to puzzle that out for yourself, if you wanted to learn how to win over crowds of people later? But I know how I should begin. Call her mother. It almost makes you love a person to call her that. And if you love her and try to please her ——”

"I've thought of another thing to do," Frisky took her up. "I shall pretend she's like you. I've noticed that when people expect a great deal of me—as you do, Miss Wales—I manage to come up to it. Perhaps if I expect my—mother to be like you—to understand and sympathize——"

"And scold hard too, sometimes," laughed Betty. "Don't forget that part of me."

The girl whom Betty had picked out as a possible secretary to Jasper J. Morton opened the door, and Frisky held up her flower-like face to be kissed and went off, a mist in her eyes at the parting. The prospective secretary didn't stay long; if she hadn't been a born "rusher," capable of getting through intricate discussions and momentous decisions in double-quick time, Betty would never have thought of recommending her. And then, with not time enough before her next appointment to begin on anything important, Betty drew out a sheet of paper and began drawing up rules, à la Madeline.

"If I come back next year," she headed the page :

*“Rule One*—All ghosts whatsoever are tabooed.

*Rule Two*—Boarding-schools need not apply for assistance.

*Rule Three*—Matrons shall arrive on time and never be ill.

*Rule Four*—In short, bothers, fusses, complications, mysteries, worries, and everything else that makes life ——”

Betty paused for an adjective, finally decided upon “interesting,” and threw down her pen with a little laugh. “That’s exactly it,” she thought. “Work and bothering and planning are what make life worth living and bring the big things around your way. Some day Morton Hall will run itself, as the Tally-ho does. Until then —— Come in, Miss Smith. Yes, I have heard from that school. Can you get a reference for Latin? There is one first year class that this teacher may have to take. You failed in Livy? Oh, I am sorry, Miss Smith! Yes, I understand; it was when you were a freshman and never dreamed of having to teach. But the Latin department could hardly recommend you, could it? Let me see what other places are vacant.”

It was a long, busy morning—a thoroughly grown-up, responsible morning for the Small Person behind the Big Desk. Once she rushed to her window to see the Ivy procession wind its snowy, green-garlanded way past, and again she deserted her post to hear the Ivy Song and to watch the pretty picture the seniors made as they sang. But neither Babbie's gay pleading, Mary Brooks's mockery, nor Helen's mournful sympathy could shake her purpose. She was going to "tend up" to the business in hand, until it was done. It might be deliciously cool and as gay and amusing as possible down under the swaying elms. 19—might be holding an "experience meeting illustrated with tableaux, blue prints, and babies" under the Hilton House birch tree.

"I can stand it to miss all that," Betty confided to Mary Brooks, "but if the afternoon people don't come on time and don't hurry through, so I can go on our own special picnic, I shall fairly weep on their shoulders."

So the last of the "afternoon people"—a leisurely freshman who had taken ten minutes to decide between two rooms in Morton Hall—was surprised to see the patient, dignified

secretary of the Student's Aid dart past her down the stairs, sprint, hatless, her curls flying, across the campus, and shriek wildly at a passing flat-car, which slowed up for a minute while a dozen willing hands caught the panting little secretary and pulled her up and on.

It was a flat-car picnic, in memory of old days. There were ginger-cookies for Roberta, who ate an unbelievable number of them, and chocolate éclairs for everybody, because on the sorrowful senior picnic there had been almost nothing else. This time there was bacon, sliced very thin, to toast on pointed sticks, rolls, some of Bridget's delicious coffee keeping hot in thermos bottles, a huge chocolate cake, and dozens of little raisin pies—the Tally-ho's very latest specialty.

"Where is Madeline?" asked Betty, helping to start the fire. She had spent the trip out in catching her breath, cooling off, and borrowing hairpins to replace those lost in her flight.

"In the gym basement," explained Christy, "with Nita and Jean Eastman. They're the costume committee for the aftermath parade,



you know. They boasted that they had done themselves proud before they came up here, but this morning Madeline had a great thought and they've been hard at it all day. They may come out later for supper."

"We promised to hang out a sign," Rachel remembered, and borrowed Helen's red sweater, which, tied by the sleeves to a sapling down near the fence, pointed unerringly to the presence of picnickers on the hill.

"If you don't send Mr. James Watson packing the minute the concert is out, you'll miss the sensation of this commencement," Madeline warned Betty solemnly when she arrived. There was a smudge of brown paint across her white linen skirt, and Nita declared feelingly that she would never make another pair of wings, no, not for any aftermath parade that ever was. These were the only clues to the extra-special features that they had planned for the evening.

At seven the returning flat-car halted by the fence, and the revelers went singing home to dress for the concert.

"Come to the gym basement for your cos-

tume," Nita whispered to Betty and K. "Find me or Jean. Madeline is as likely as not to forget all about being there."

When Jim and Betty reached the campus it was gay with lanterns, and girls in evening dress and their escorts were everywhere.

"How about a hammock in a quiet spot?" suggested Jim. "The music is prettiest from a distance, don't you think?"

Of course, all the hammocks were full long since, but the obliging Georgia Ames and three other footsore junior ushers politely vacated theirs, insisting that they were only resting for a minute, and Jim sat on the ground at Betty's feet and inquired for her stage-struck friend, the cheery Mrs. Post, and the Morton Hall-ites, and then for Betty's summer schedule.

"I might be in Cleveland," Jim announced tentatively. "The firm is working on plans for two houses out there."

"Then you could come out to the cottage for Sundays," Betty said cheerily. "Will would love to take you sailing. I hate to go in those bobbing little boats, so I stay on shore."

"I'm not so very keen about sailing, either," Jim said.

"Then I'm afraid you'd better not come," Betty told him sweetly. "Sailing and swimming are positively the only amusements out there."

"Except talking to you."

"Oh, I'm the family cook," Betty explained. "If you think I'm busy here, you should see me bustle around in summer."

"I see." Jim changed the subject. "Is Morton Hall to the queen's taste since we fixed the linen rooms?"

"Oh, yes, Jim," Betty assured him. "It's a model—any amount nicer than the other campus houses."

"Thanks for the firm," Jim said, and then was quiet so long that Betty inquired laughingly if he had been to the Bay of the Ploshkin after his blues.

"Not yet," he told her. "I've felt like it sometimes, but I was afraid I'd worn out your sympathy. I say, Betty, you'll write to a fellow once in a while, won't you? And if I should come to Cleveland—doesn't the family cook get her evenings off?"

"Some of them."

"Betty, Betty, Betty Wales!" chanted an unseen chorus. "Time to dress for the after-math parade!"

So Jim said a hasty good-bye and waited under the group of elms that Betty had pointed out, to see 19— march by. Somebody had suggested having a costumed procession this year, and the seniors and half a dozen recently graduated classes had vied with one another in planning queer and effective uniforms. There were masked classes, classes with red parasols, classes with purple sunbonnets and purple fans, classes with yellow caps and gowns. But 19—'s close-fitting green robes were lighted up by weird green torches, and in the middle of the ranks marched all the 19— animals—the Jabberwock, the Green Dragon, the Mock Turtle and the Gryphon from an Alice in Wonderland show, ploshkins in assorted sizes with pink shoe-strings waving in their paws, and finally a little reckless ritherum hopping along in the rear. It jumped at the waving pink shoe-strings, it snatched a green lantern from the hands of a green-robed figure and

charged with it blithely into the laughing crowd, and when it came to the elm trees where Jim was standing it darted straight at him and whispered, "Good-bye again, Jim. Do manage to come to Cleveland sometimes and talk to the cook," and was off again after a pink shoe-string before Jim had discovered what was happening to him.

An hour later Betty shed her ritherum costume—it was rather warm, being composed of Georgia's gym suit, the burlap that Lucille had bought to pack around her Morris chair, a peacock feather fan, and a pair of snow-shoes for wings—and she and Madeline, Roberta, Rachel, K., Nita, Helen, the B's, and Christy went out on the fire-escape to cool off and watch the other classes coming home.

"Must be jolly to stay up here all the time," said Nita hungrily. "There's always something going on, and it's all queer and different and fun."

"It's a pretty good world, wherever you are, I think," announced K. briskly.

"It's whatever kind you make it," Madeline amended K.'s sentiment.

"And we're all making it something rather

nice that it wouldn't be, perhaps, without us," Roberta added.

"We've never decided what it takes to make a B. C. A.," said Madeline. "If we had we could tell Nita, and she could cultivate the combination."

"We shall have that left for conversation at the first tea-drinking next fall," laughed Christy. "There are always such dreadful pauses."

"It's always well to have something left for next fall just the same," said little Helen primly.

"Yes," agreed Rachel, who was secretly considering a year's study in New York. "There may be more of us B. C. A.'s and there may be less, but there'll surely be a topic of conversation."

"And an Object," added Madeline, hugging Betty, "with curls and a dimple, and a finger in everybody's pie, and a few over."

"Why, that's just what Jim Watson said about me," laughed Betty, "only he didn't call it pie."

"Jim Watson," said Madeline severely, "is politely requested to keep his distance. We

can't spare you to him—not for years and years and years to come.”

“I should think not,” echoed Christy, Rachel, and Helen in an indignant chorus.

“Girls, please stop talking such perfect nonsense,” said Betty calmly. “Let's climb down the fire-escape and go to bed.”

**The Stories in this Series are:**

BETTY WALES, FRESHMAN  
BETTY WALES, SOPHOMORE  
BETTY WALES, JUNIOR  
BETTY WALES, SENIOR  
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